KISHORE SATSANG

PRAVESH

A Textbook of the Satsang Examinations Series: 4

Kishore Satsang Pravesh

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Glossary

Blessings

The youth movement established and nourished by Brahmaswarup Yogiji Maharaj has been expanding at a very rapid pace. With a view to satisfying the aspirations and the thirst for knowledge of the youth joining the organization, and also to enable them to understand and imbibe the principles of Akshar and Purushottam expounded by Bhagwan Swaminarayan, the publications division, Swaminarayan Aksharpith, organized under the auspices of Bochasanwasi Shri Akshar Purushottam Swaminarayan Sanstha, presents a series of books.

Through these books, it is intended to impart systematic, sustained and pure knowledge in simple language on a scholastic basis to children and youth of the Swaminarayan Sampradaya. It is hoped that this Sanstha, established by Brahmaswarup Shastriji Maharaj for implementing and propagating the Vedic ideals propounded by Bhagwan Swaminarayan, will, through this activity, spread the ideals and noble traditions of the Sampradaya and through it, the culture and heritage of the Hindu religion.

It is the aim of this project to preach and spread the divine message of Bhagwan Swaminarayan to all corners of the world. We hope that all religious-minded truth-seekers of the Sampradaya and those outside of it, will welcome this activity and extend their fullest co-operation.

In order to encourage children and youths, annual examinations are held based on the curriculum as worked out in these books. Certificates are also awarded to successful candidates. We bless Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami, Prof. Rameshbhai Dave, Kishorebhai Dave, and all others who have cooperated in the preparation of these books.

Shastri Narayanswarupdasji
(Pramukh Swami Maharaj)
Jai Swaminarayan

Vasant Panchmi
V.S. 2028 (1972 CE)
Atladra

Publisher's Note

The Swaminarayan Sampraday has its unique tradition of worship rituals, festivals and observances. They are based on the Vedic Sanatan (Hindu) Dharma and have been revealed by Bhagwan Swaminarayan through his teachings and their practical application in his life. It is by following these conventions and commands that the lives of all *satsangis* can be properly moulded. By living according to these traditions devotees can protect themselves from bad company, become ideal *satsangis* and attain ultimate redemption in life.

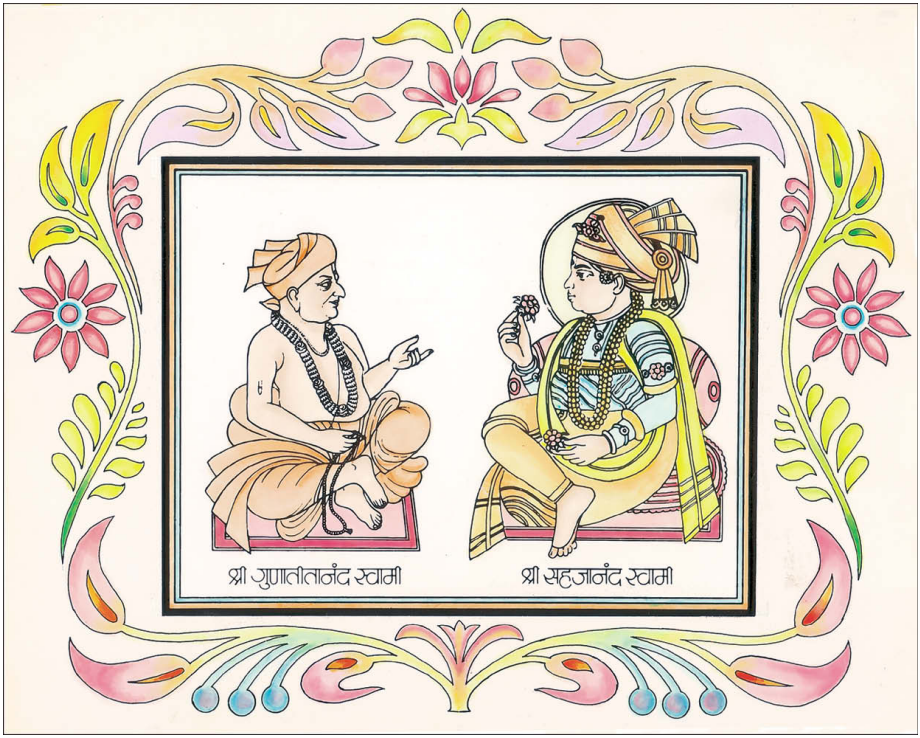
Basic religious vows *(vrats)* of *satsang,* prayers, *dhun,* puja, *arti, thal* and others, along with life sketches of Shriji Maharaj, Aksharbrahman Gunatitanand Swami, other *paramhansas* and devotees are briefly described in this book in a lucid language. This book will provide a greater understanding of and attachment to Satsang.

This publication in English is a translation of the Gujarati book *Kishoree Satsang Pravesh.*

This book has been designed to serve as part of the curriculum for the Satsang Examinations. More specifically, it is one of the textbooks for the second level examination, Satsang Pravesh.

It is our earnest prayer that all *satsangis* study this book carefully, pass the examinations with flying colours, and above all, derive immense spiritual benefits and please Bhagwan Swaminarayan and guru Pramukh Swami Maharaj.

- Swaminarayan Aksharpith



Ame sau Swāminā bālak, marishu Swāmine māte;
Ame sau Shrijitanā yuvak, ladishu Shrijine māte...
Nathi dartā nathi kartā, amārā jānni parvā;
Amāre dar nathi koino, ame janmyā chhie marvā...ame 1
Ame ā yagna ārambhyo, balidāno ame daishu;
Amārā Akshar Purushottam, Gunātit jnānne gāishu...ame 2
Ame sau Shriji tanā putro, Akshare vās amāro chhe;
Svadharmi bhasma choli to, amāre kshobh shāno chhe...ame 3
Juo sau motinā Swāmi, na rākhi kai te khāmi;
Pragat Purushottam pāmi, malyā Gunātit Swāmi...ame 4

Translation

Pledge: Ame Sau Swamina Balak...

We are the children of Swami; we will die for him. We are the youths of Shriji Maharaj; we will fight for him. We are fearless; we will not shirk sacrificing our lives, for we are born to die. We have launched this movement and will undergo any suffering. We will sing the praises of Akshar-Purushottam.

We are the sons of Shriji Maharaj; we have our abode in Akshar. Consecrated as we are to *swadharma* (religious faith), we have no apprehension whatsoever. Lord Purushottam and Akshar, Gunatitanand Swami, are with us. We have accomplished our

goal.

1. Shikshapatri

Unlike other animals, humans are obliged to observe dharma, or moral principles. A life without morality is animalistic and brutish. Hence, it is important to understand what morality is in order to navigate through life's difficult choices. Bhagwan Swaminarayan reveals, "Dharma is virtuous conduct."

Our Dharmashastras, describe many ethical principles, rules of social conduct, and atonements for sins. However, understanding these vast Dharmashastras can be a difficult task. Fortunately, Shriji Maharaj has extracted the essence from the ocean of scriptures and presented it in the Shikshapatri. If the Dharmashastras are an ocean of milk, then the Shikshapatri is its cream.

The Shikshapatriis not only a shastra on ethical behaviour, but it is also a means to attaining the four *purusharths* of human life, namely dharma, *artha, kama,* and *moksha*. In this way he has strengthened the practice of dharma.

The Shikshapatri 'is for the good all *jivas'*. Explaining its purpose and glory, Shriji Maharaj says, "The essence of all the shastras has been extracted and written in this Shikshapatri. For this reason, my devotees must earnestly observe the Shikshapatri daily, but should never act wilfully." That is, the yearnings of the mind must be given up and the commands of Maharaj obeyed.

Maharaj has promised, "Whoever lives according to the Shikshapatri will certainly attain the four *purusharths* of dharma, *artha, kama* and *moksha*." Further, Shriji Maharaj states, "Consider these words to be my form, and obey the Shikshapatri with the greatest reverence."

So, Maharaj has instructed that the Shikshapatri be read daily. Those who cannot read should listen to its recital. If this is not possible it should be worshipped daily. On days when none of these commands is obeyed, Maharaj has instructed his devotees to fast on that day (Vachanamrut, Gadhada III 1).

Harmony in speech, thought and actions is possible only by observing the Shikshapatri. The codes of the Shikshapatri are not merely for cleanliness and good behaviour, but are divine practices to be observed for Shriji Maharaj's blessings; observing them sincerely leads to *moksha*.

However, these moral principles cannot be internalized without the help of a guide. Surrendering to the manifest God-realized Satpurush provides the spiritual strength to observe Shriji Maharaj's principles.

The merits of previous births lead a spiritual aspirant to such a *satpurush*. When the aspirant accepts the *satpurush* as guru and firmly resolves to observe the five basic vows, the guru initiates him into the Sampradaya with the mantra: "*Kāl māyā, pāp karma, yamdut, bhayādaham, Swaminarayan sharanam prapannosmi, sa pātu mām*." By reciting this mantra the guru frees the aspirant from past sins, leads him to Shriji Maharaj's refuge and makes him a *satsangi*. The guru then places a *kanthi* made of two

strands of threaded *tulsi* beads, around the devotee's neck. The two strands of the *kanthi* symbolize the aspirant's refuge in Akshar and Purushottam. Devoteeswear this *kanthi* for the rest of their lives (Shikshapatri 41). God always protects a devotee who has accepted this *kanthi* as a symbol of his refuge.

Nitya Karma (Daily Rituals)

Nitya Karma refers to our daily rituals, or actions that we perform everyday. This section details the principles in the Shikshapatrithat describe a devotee's *nitya karma* (specifically those described in Shikshapatri *shlokas* 40 to 54 and 61 to 64).

All sadhus and householder devotees of Shriji Maharaj should daily wake up before sunrise and meditate on God. Waking up early in the morning increases energy and mental peace. Also, rising early fills our mind with noble thoughts and in this peaceful atmosphere we experience great joy in meditation, worship and recollection of the divine incidents of God. Waking up late, however, not only deprives us of these benefits, but also gradually strips us of our virtues. Today, the habit of late rising is widespread, but it is a bad habit. So, all devotees should awake before sunrise.

After going to the toilet to empty the bowels one should wash one's hands thoroughly with soap. Then sit in one place to brush one's teeth, and clean the wash basin when finished.

After brushing one should take a bath. Our scriptures emphasize the importance of taking a morning bath with clean water. A person is considered impure until he bathes in the morning. In addition, one can perform puja only after having taken a bath. It is believed that bathing with cold water on the banks of a river or a lake is best, because bathing with cold water generates strength and energy in our body. After bathing, wear washed clothes and then perform puja. One who performs puja without wearing an upper garment is considered naked.

For puja, we spread two pieces of clean cloth on the floor. We should place our *murtis* on one cloth and sit on the other one. If we don't sit on one of these three types of mats or if we sit directly on the floor, our puja is considered incomplete.

We should do puja facing east or north. Our scriptures explain that we should face these directions because east represents the direction of the devas. In addition, our scriptures prohibit sitting for puja facing west or south.

First, male devotees should apply a *tilak*, a 'U'-shaped mark, of sandalwood paste on their foreheads and then imprint a *chandlo,* around mark, of *kumkum* inside the *tilak*. All male devotees, young and old, whether they are students, employees, or businessmen, should imprint a *tilak-chandlo* on their foreheads.

There are many benifits of wearing a *tilak-chandlo*. By applying a *tilak-chandlo* on our forehead, Shriji Maharaj and the *satpurush* will protect us from influences that lead us to act immorally. Applying a *tilak-chandlo* gives awareness that we should not act immorally. In addition, if students form a habit of applying the *tilak-chandlo* from early childhood, then they will get exceptional moral and spiritual strength.

If one does not apply a *tilak-chandlo*, however, the mind becomes weak and one is tempted to act inappropriately.

As the *tilak-chandlo* influences our inclination to act morally, it represents dharma.

Married women should apply only a round *kumkum chandlo* on their foreheads; whereas widows should not put on a *tilak* or *chandlo*. As far as possible the *tilak* and *chandlo* should be applied using sanctified sandalwood paste and *kumkum* offered to God. The *tilak* and *chandlo* should be applied carefully so as to look decent.1

Then one should offer *mansi puja*. *Mansi puja* is a special form of meditation in which one pictures oneself serving God and his choicest devotee. This form of worship is scientifically proven to calm the mind. Before offering *mansi puja*, one should calm the mind by contemplating on one's *atma,* believing it as the manifest God-realized guru. Beholding Shriji Maharaj in one's heart and while remembering the manifest Satpurush, *mansi puja* should be offered five times a day:

1. At dawn, one should entreat Maharaj to awake and visualize his morning activities.
2. At about 11.00 a.m. one should offer lunch with full devotion and request Maharaj to take afternoon rest.
3. At 4.00 p.m. one should wake Maharaj up and offer fruits and other snacks.
4. At dusk offer *arti* and evening meal.
5. At night before going to sleep, offer prayers.

Mansi puja should be offered with reverence and devotion and with the best offerings that can be imagined (Vachanamrut, Gadhada III 23).

Thereafter, one should offer worship to the *murtis* given by our guru: the *murtis* of Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj, Bhagatji Maharaj, Shastriji Maharaj, Yogiji Maharaj and Pramukh Swami Maharaj should be worshipped in puja (62). After reciting a *mantra* to invoke God in the *murtis*, one should chant the Swaminarayan *mahamantra* while turning a *mala*. Then, after performing five *pradakshinas* and five *sashtang dandvats*, one should offer an additional sixth prostration, as commanded by Shriji Maharaj in Vachanamrut, Gadhada II 40, for forgiveness for having knowingly or unknowingly offended a devotee by thought, word or deed. *Sashtang* prostration means lying flat on the stomach with the head, chest, thighs, feet, and hands touching the floor, and the eyes, specch and mind focused on God. *Sashtang* is considered the best type of prostration. Then *thal* is offered in *mansi puja*. Then we should ask for forgiveness for all our faults, any mistakes we may have committed during the *puja* and offer our prayers. After this, one should recite the mantra requesting God to return from the *murtis* to our hearts. Thus our puja is finished.

Thereafter, as commanded in the Vachanamrutby Shriji Maharaj (Vachanamrut, Gadhada III 1), one should recite loudly the verses of the Shikshapatri.

In case of disability, old age or some other adversity, one should give one's daily puja to another devotee to perform (61).

Satsangis should go to the mandir every evening and should sing aloud kirtans praising God. On festival days, the kirtansshould be sung to the accompaniment of musical instruments. The influence of evil spirits is said to be stronger in the evenings,

so one should engage in darshan and *arti*. The evening *arti* is graced by the presence of Shriji Maharaj, Aksharbrahman and innumerable liberated souls, and so the evening *arti* should be attended by all (63).

One should not approach the guru or deity empty-handed, but should offer money, food grains, fruits or flowers according to one's financial capacity (37).

One should then listen to discourses or narrations from the shastras. Also, one should daily study the holy shastras of the Sampradaya, composed in Sanskrit or vernacular, to the best of one's ability. One should sing *cheshta – Dhyanchintamani* and *Lilachintamani* – every night and mentally visualize God retiring to bed. One who recites the *cheshta* is rewarded with the merits of having listened to the four Vedas, six Darshans, eighteen Purans and other shastras. By thinking constantly of God's divine actions and form, one's mind becomes attached to Shriji Maharaj. All worldly activities performed throughout the day come to rest and, even in deep sleep, one retains contact with God. Therefore, every *satsangi* should make it a rule to retire to bed only after the recitation of *cheshta*.

Now we shall refer to the codes of pure conduct laid down in the Shikshapatri.

Ahimsa (Non-Violence)

'*Ahimsa paramo dharma*' – Non-violence is the highest ethical code laid down in all the shastras. No one should harm any creature by body, mind or speech; nor should anyone intentionally kill insects such as lice, bugs, etc. Even for the purpose of performing *yagnas*, none should kill animals. This is because it is a sin to kill animals and offer them as sacrifices. Shriji Maharaj even refused to pluck spinach leaves in Jagannathpuri on the grounds that it also has life. None should ever commit murder for women, wealth or a kingdom (11, 12, 13). King Uparicharvasu, even though he ruled the whole world, practiced *ahimsa*. Shriji Maharaj has explained in the Vachanamrut that non-violence is the dharma by which one is led to liberation (Vachanamrut, Gadhada I 69). Harsh words which create mental pain also tantamount to *himsa*.

Satya (Truth)

Always speak in a truthful, loving and beneficial manner. Never speak untruth. One should never tell a lie even for financial or other gains. One should never utter truth which may cause danger to one's life or to another's. For example, if a butcher chasing a cow to kill it asks, "Where has the cow gone?" one should tell a lie to save the life of the cow.

Ethical Code

Dharmais virtuous conduct. However rewarding it may be, one should desist from any act which is contrary to dharma, for verily dharma alone yields all desired objects. Therefore, one should never discard dharma out of greed for women, wealth or other benefits. One should not uphold any ignoble deeds which may have been performed by the great persons of the past, but one should only emulate their noble deeds (73, 74).

Through this injunction Shriji Maharaj has explained that all deeds should be based on dharma. Avoid unrighteous living, such as indulging in eating meat, drinking alcohol, smoking, and other unwholesome thoughts or habits, regardless of the temptations. All true rewards are earned by dharma only.

Shriji Maharaj orders that one should not steal, even for the sake of dharma. He specifically prohibited stealing or using unrighteous means in serving a mandir, a deity or sadhus. It is essential for a devotee to be completely moral and righteous.

Suicide

Formerly people hoping to attain heaven used to commit suicide in places of pilgrimage. But suicide is a form of *himsa* and should not be committed. Even when one has committed any unbecoming act one should not, in a fit of anger or in repentance thereof, ever commit suicide by means of poison, strangulation, a headlong plunge into a well, by throwing oneself from atop a high place or any other method. No one should mutilate with a weapon any part of his body or that of others in a fit of anger (14, 16). The Vedas proclaim, "Of all things the *atma* should be protected." Liberation can be obtained only in the human form. The human body is awarded to offer devotion to God and is attained after a lapse of thirty five million *prakrut pralays*. Therefore, taking into consideration the importance and rarity of this human body, one should never commit suicide.

Prohibition of Meat Eating

One has to kill animals to eat meat. Killing is a grave sin. Shriji Maharaj has recommended performance of only non-violent *yagnas*. So, one should never eat flesh, even if it is the remnants of offerings in a sacrifice, even in circumstances of great difficulty. One should not eat or drink the offerings made to a deity to whom flesh and wine are offered. Even unclean food grains and unsieved flour should not be used, as they are likely to contain small insects which may be killed. So, this should also be avoided. No one should bathe with dirty water which breeds insects (15, 22, 30). The Mahabharat declares, "A man who does not take wine and meat is as good as a man who performs the Ashwamedh Yagna every month."

Prohibition of Liquor

Drinking of liquor arouses *tamas* (darkness) within. Even if it has been offered to a deity, it should not be taken. The scriptures state that if even a drop of liquor falls on one's shoes, the animal whose skin was utilized for making those shoes goes to hell. Manu Smriti lists wine drinking as one of the five grave sins. One should never take medicines in which liquor or meat has been mixed or which are prescribed by a physician whose conduct is not known (15, 31).

Meat eating and wine drinking are considered a necessity in this modern age. They have been adopted either for making money in business or for promoting a person's social status. But such indulgence is a grave sin and cannot be pardoned under any circumstances. *Satsangis* should never take meat or drink alcohol. Those followers

going abroad for the sake of studies or for some other purpose should also strictly observe these rules. Experience confirms that one can live even in a foreign country without taking meat and alcohol, i.e. as a strict vegetarian and teetotaller. So this rule must not be violated under any temptation of social status, company or material benefit. Observance of this rule holds great importance for obtaining the grace of Shriji Maharaj.

Theft

None shall steal even for dharma. Even those who donate stolen articles go to hell, and the merits of donation go to the party whose money was stolen. Even taking fuel, flowers, etc. without the consent of their owners is regarded as theft. Not returning things that are borrowed is also regarded as a form of theft. Wealth obtained through fraudulent means does not bring happiness. No one should stealthily enter a house or shop, pass through any field or put up in a place without the owner's permission. Theft, along with drinking liquor, is also considered as one of the five grave sins people should not commit. Therefore, none should commit a theft in any way (17, 33).

Addictions

Intoxicating substances like hashish, morphine, marijuana, opium, tobacco, heroin, etc. should not be taken, drunk or inhaled. They artificially stimulate the body and mind, thus making man a slave of addictions. Gunatitanand Swami has said, "The amount wastefully spent by *kusangis* is more than enough to meet the daily needs of a *satsangi*."

Gambling in any form – playing cards, betting on races, speculating, etc. – are also various kinds of vices. Films and dramas must not be seen. Yudhishtir lost his kingdom because of his passion for gambling with dice. Addictions increase our greediness and consequently ruin us. Therefore, one should keep away from these vices. However, if by bad company, one is lured into the indulgence of any one of these habits, then it must be shaken off by *satsang* and the company of sadhus.

Adultery

One must not commit adultery either by mind, speech or body. One should not even look at women with an immoral eye. *Brahamacharya* is the greatest virtue and earns the immense blessings of God. In this day and age, when, innumerable vices arise from men and women mix freely with one another and take undue liberty. These incidents ultimately spell moral degeneration for the people involved. Therefore, today, there is a need for the strict practice of this virtue. *Satsangis* should never look at women with evil thoughts and should abide by the ethical codes given (18).

Discrimination in Dietary Habits

Shriji Maharaj has stressed the ethical code relating to the *varna* and *ashram* of all people. Those who transgress these tenets start eating food prepared by people of any background and, as a result, they suffer from many illnesses. None should eat or drink

anything that is prepared or served by people of unacceptable background, even if it is *prasad* offered to a deity. The ready-made food served in shops and restaurants is often prepared from unfiltered milk, ghee and water. Besides, it may be adulterated food and, therefore, should not be eaten. Onion and garlic also should not be eaten as they provoke the state of *tamoguna*. Scriptures state, "Purity in food habits purifies the self and this results in the realization of Brahman." Therefore, purity in food habits is essential to progress on the spiritual path (19). Eating whatever and wherever one likes, without discretion, maligns one's wisdom and thus one can never become a good devotee.

Swadharma

One must not violate the code of *varnashram* dharma. That is, one should never act in a way which is not in keeping with the stage of one's life or one which is not based on the shastras. If an ascetic gives up the code of his order and takes to the dharma of householders, then he is said to have accepted another's dharma. The Gita also insists on strict adherence to one's own dharma.

Destroying the barriers of dharma, which is the protector of all, is hypocrisy. One should not follow or devote oneself to a dharma which is not in agreement with the Vedas or which is atheistic. One should not follow cults which do not have the sanction of the shastras, or follow those gurus whose behaviour is not in accordance with the scriptural codes.

Places Prescribed for Discharge of Excretion

Shatanand Muni writes in the Satsangijivan, "One should not spit or discharge one's bodily excretions in another's premises, government offices, at another's place of residence, near police stations and such other places prohibited by public authorities. Similarly, one should not spit or eject bodily excretions near or in places like *gaushalas*, mandirs, banks of rivers or ponds, roads, in cultivated fields, under trees, gardens, public parks, water reservoirs, ant-hills and other such places which have been prohibited by the scriptures" (32).

Clothing

One should not wear any garments that are likely to expose any part of the body to public view. Super-fine, transparent and mini garments should not be worn. These styles of clothing arouse sensuality in the mind (38).

Occasional Observances

Eclipses and other occasional events require observance only when the occasion arises. The rites to be performed during eclipses are described below.

Eclipses

During the solar and lunar eclipses, devotees should suspend all their usual activities, and prepare themselves in an undefiled state to sit and pray at one place by

chanting the Swaminarayan *mahamantra*. During the period of the eclipse no other work should be done. Only the praises of God should be sung. During an eclipse the atmosphere is impure. Thus, we should not touch clothes or even cooked food. However, if *darbh* – a kind of grass – is spread over pickles, milk, buttermilk, oil, etc. they will not be affected by the atmosphere.

One should not eat during the four *prahars* before a solar eclipse and three *prahars* before a lunar eclipse. After the eclipse, one must bathe wearing the clothes that were worn during the eclipse. Thereafter, householders should donate to the deities and the needy as per their ability and sadhus should perform *pujan* of God (86, 87).

Relaxation in the Observance of Dharma

One should never relax in the performance of one's duties in the face of very ordinary difficulties. Relaxation of duties is prescribed by the shastras for absolute emergencies only (48). This is known as *apad* dharma. This is the dharma allowed in periods of great difficulty. The shastras permit one who is seriously ill to eat on the day of a fast, but one should not use this relaxation to take food during a minor illness. The Mahabharatinstructs, "*Apad* dharma should be resorted to only in the face of death. Once the calamity has cleared then one should observe the normal rules of dharma."

In the Chhandogya Upanishad, there is a story of Ushasti Rishi. Ushasti did not get food for many days. He was about to die. On his last breath he went to a *mahavat,* who was at that time eating putrefied black lentils, and asked for some food. The *mahavat* gave him the half-eaten food from his dish, which Ushasti ate. Thereafter, the *mahavat* offered him water. Ushasti said, "No, I can stay alive with the black lentils for now. I shall not drink the water from which you have already drunk." This should be recognized as appropriate practice of *apad* dharma.

Today, observance of dharma has deteriorated because people have started treating minor problems as *apad* dharma.

Atonement

We have now seen some of the various ethical rules prescribed by Bhagwan Swaminarayan. If knowingly or unknowingly any of these rules are transgressed, then for purification, rules for atonement are also given in scriptures like the Satsangijivan. Similarly, the words of a sadhu who has attained God-realization are also considered as dharma. Therefore, whatever he instructs one to do in atonement for a sin purifies one from that sin, but it should be done with full faith. After having atoned for the sin the devotee becomes purified. He should not then be considered a sinner (92).

2. Sagram

Sagram and his wife show the owner the valuable ornament lying on the road

In 1813 (Samvat 1869), a terrible famine struck Gujarat. It was a time when even rich merchants were scavenging for grains; one can only imagine the plight of the poor! Sagram was a poor man who lived in Limli, a village near Vadhwan. Suffering from starvation and overcome with despair, he set out with his wife to seek help from Muktanand Swami.

As he walked his foot suddenly hit something. He looked down and noticed a shiny silver ornament. It was quite large, weighing about half a kilo. However, as he was a devout *satsangi*, even the thought of picking it up did not cross his mind. Yet, he knew that times were hard; he became concerned that his wife may be tempted to take it. He quickly kicked some dust over the ornament to hide it from her.

Meanwhile, his wife was following a short distance behind him. She was engaged in recalling Shriji Maharaj's divine form when she noticed Sagram occupied with something on the road. Wondering what Sagram was doing, she caught up to him and asked about his curious behaviour. Sagram innocently explained himself.

His wife exclaimed, "Oh! You have simply covered dust with dust! To me another's belongings are as useless as dust." Sagram was humbled, but within he was overjoyed by her understanding.

They both continued to walk. After some time, they met some people who seemed distressed. The group of strangers sceptically assessed Sagram and his wife. From appearances they felt that Sagram and his wife were not trustworthy. They asked Sagram, "Did you come across an ornament lying on the road?"

"Yes, we have seen it. It is lying over there." Sagram described the exact place where they had seen the ornament. But they did not trust Sagram. They felt it was

highly improbable that anyone, especially someone like Sagram, would have left such a valuable ornament on the road. It was more likely, they felt, that he was lying and was actually trying keep it for himself. With this suspicion, they took Sagram along with them to retrieve the ornament. When they came to that part of the road, they pushed aside the dust and, to their surprise, uncovered the missing ornament. Grateful, they offered Sagram and his wife a reward. Sagram, however, politely declined with the explanation that, "We are devotees of Bhagwan Swaminarayan; we were just following our religious vows." They were amazed at the integrity of Sagram and his wife.

Thereafter, Sagram and his wife continued along the dusty road. After an exhausting journey, they finally arrived in Surat. When they went to Muktanand Swami, he greeted Sagram and asked him how he was coping with the famine. Sagram hesitantly revealed his desperate situation. Muktanand Swami trusted Sagram completely, and he arranged for Sagram and his wife to work for a devotee to tide them over this difficult period. After the famine passed, Sagram and his wife returned home.

Sagram was born in the Vaghri community. At that time, society considered people of this community to be low, immoral and uncivilized. Regardless of society's prejudices, Muktanand Swami had initiated Sagram and made him a devotee of Shriji Maharaj. Because Sagram moulded his life according to Shriji Maharaj's wishes, his life became purer than that of even the Brahmins, who at that time were considered the cultural and intellectual elite. Sagram had imbibed such high standards of morality that if he even accidently touched a woman other than his wife, he would take a bath and fast on that day and thus atone for even this tiny lapse in his vow of fidelity.

Word of such miraculous transformations of character spread through society. Someone told Vajesinh, the King of Bhavnagar, "Swaminarayan transforms Vaghris into Vaishnavs." In disbelief, the King had Sagram summoned to his court. Sagram came to the royal court of Bhavnagar State and sat humbly at the feet of the King. Searching for the reason for Sagram's transformation, the King probed, "Sagram! Has Swaminarayan shown you any miracles?"

"Oh! My Lord, you are the master of the kingdom, whereas we are Vaghris. We lived brutishly until Swaminarayan inspired us to live a pure life by giving us spiritual vows. So, for someone like me to be able to sit here before you is itself a great miracle. " The king was pleased with Sagram's frank and reasoned response.

Sagram nurtured a secret wish in his mind: "Maharaj travels from town to town and sanctifies the homes of many devotees; how wonderful it would be if he were to come and sanctify my small hut." Truly pleased with Sagram's faithful devotion, Shriji Maharaj decided to fulfil Sagram's inner wish. One night, Shriji Maharaj went unannounced to Sagram's hut. When Sagram realized that Shriji Maharaj had come to fulfil his wish, his joy knew no bounds. Sagram's hut was so small, there was hardly enough room to stand. Sagram quickly brought a small cot for Maharaj to sit on, and unable to hold back his enthusiasm, danced while singing, "An elephant has entered my hut!" To Sagram, Shriji Maharaj's visit to his humble dwelling was as inconceivable as fitting an elephant in a small hut. Sagram's wife also rejoiced at Shriji Maharaj's

unexpected visit. Shriji Maharaj lovingly ate what she prepared for him. Both were overwhelmed by Maharaj's compassion for them. In those days, it was considered unthinkable for even a high-caste person, let alone God, to visit a Vaghri's hut. From this incident, Sagram realized that in God's eyes, it is a devotee's devotion, and not his social status that is important.

Although people often found it surprising, Sagram was well-versed in the scriptures. Once, he defeated Shivram Bhatt of Shiyani in a spiritual debate. Impressed with Sagram's spiritual wisdom, Shivram Bhatt realized Shriji Maharaj's greatness and became his disciple.

3. Vyapkanand Swami

Vyapkanand Swami revives the dead horse of Hamir Khachar

Shitaldas of Jharnaparna, a village in North India, once heard of Ramanand Swami's greatness and decided to go to Faneni in Gujarat for his darshan. However, when he arrived in Faneni Shitaldas was disappointed to learn that Ramanand Swami had passed away.

Seeing Shitaldas's disappointment, Maharaj consoled him by promising him Ramanand Swami's darshan if he stayed in Faneni. In anticipation of Ramanand Swami's darshan, Shitaldas agreed to stay.

Then, Maharaj asked Shitaldas to chant the 'Swaminarayan' mantra. As soon as Shitaldas began chanting 'Swaminarayan' a miracle occurred. By Shriji Maharaj's grace, he went into samadhi and experienced the divine bliss of God. When Shitaldas came out of samadhi, he narrated his divine experience, "Maharaj was seated on a lustrous

throne in the divinely luminous Akshardham. Rama, Krishna, all the avatars, and even Ramanand Swami were standing and offering their prayers to Shriji Maharaj. I performed Maharaj's *pujan*. I wanted to perform *pujan* of all the *muktas* there. However, I was only one and there were infinite *muktas*.

"At that point, Shriji Maharaj suggested to me, 'Make a wish that if Rama, Krishna, Ramanand Swami, or any avatar is the Supreme God, Parabrahman Purna Purushottam, then may I assume infinite forms so that I can perform *pujan* of the infinite *muktas* simultaneously.' I recited this in my mind, but nothing happened.

"Then as proposed by Maharaj I made a wish that if Shriji Maharaj is supreme God, Purna Purushottam, then may I assume infinite forms and perform *pujan* of the infinite *muktas* simultaneously. As soon as I repeated this in my mind, I saw infinite forms of myself and I simultaneously performed *pujan* of all. At that time, Ramanand Swami explained to me, 'Sahajanand Swami is God, the cause of all of the avatars, and we are his devoted servants.' So beautiful was Akshardham! So resplendent was Maharaj! Indescribable."

The entire assembly was spellbound by Shitaldas' words. As he was narrating his experience, many other devotees also went into samadhi and had similar experiences. Convinced of Shriji Maharaj's greatness, Shitaldas decided to take sadhu *diksha* from Maharaj. On that same day, Shriji Maharaj initiated him and named him Vyapkanand Swami.

Once during his travels, Vyapkanand Swami decided to rest in an ancient mandir of Vasukinag, near the village of Thangad. Sculpted stone statues of dancing women were positioned inside the dome of this mandir. As Vyapkanand Swami walked in, these sensual statues caught his attention. He felt that the statues were actually dancing. Realizing that he had become enchanted by their appearance, he said a prayer and quickly cleared his thoughts. He understood the validity of Shriji Maharaj's rule forbidding sadhus from even looking at pictures or statues of women. From this incident, Vyapkanand Swami realized the importance of obeying even the smallest of Shriji Maharaj's *niyams*.

Once, Vyapkanand Swami visited Hamir Khachar's home in Botad. As Vyapkanand Swami entered he heard their grief-stricken cries. There was something wrong. Someone informed Swami that Hamir Khachar's horse had died and was unable to bear the loss; he was weeping as if he had lost his son. Vyapkanand Swami felt sorry for him. He took some water in his palm, and chanting the Swaminarayan mantra, sprinkled it over the dead horse. Then, he took the soul of a mosquito and transferred it into the dead horse. Immediately, the horse came back to life. Hamir Khachar was overjoyed and fell at Vyapkanand Swami's feet in gratitude.

Vyapkanand Swami later went to meet Shriji Maharaj in Jhinjhavadar. However instead of greeting Vyapkanand Swami, Shriji Maharaj sarcastically told Khimbai, "Our God has arrived, so prepare a sumptuous *thal* for him."

Khimbai was confused. She asked, "Maharaj, who can be your God?"

"Vyapkanand Swami is our God," revealed Maharaj teasingly.

Dismayed by Maharaj's words, Vyapkanand Swami pleaded, "Maharaj! I am your

servant. Please don't call me your God."

"You bring the dead back to life. That is why I am calling you God," Maharaj responded.

"I felt sorry for Hamir Khachar," clarified Vyapkanand Swami, "and so I took a soul from one body and placed it into another. Please forgive me if I have made a mistake."

Maharaj then explained, "We have not come on this earth to bring the dead back to life. We have come teach everyone the true knowledge of *atma* and Paramatma. We want to remove everyone's ignorance and take them to Akshardham."

Maharaj continued, "It was due to my will that the horse came to life, but what will happen when a king's son dies and you are unable to revive him? The king will have you killed! So, from now on, stick to imparting wisdom, not performing miracles."

Overcome with remorse, Vyapkanand Swami begged Maharaj's forgiveness. Soon after, Vyapkanand Swami left for Gadhada with Maharaj's permission.

4. Godi

Raag Purav

(1)

Sant samāgam kije, ho nishdin… 1
Mān taji santanke mukhse, prem sudhāras pije… 2
Antar kapat metke apnā, le unku man dije… 3
Bhavdukh tale bale sab dushkrit, sabvidhi kāraj sije… 4
Brahmānand kahe santki sobat, janma sufal kari lije… 5

Meaning:

Associate with the Satpurush day and night…1

Shed one's ego and drink the nectar of (divine) love from the Satpurush…2

Shed one's inner deceit and surrender the mind to him…3

Worldly miseries and sinful deeds are destroyed, and all actions become fruitful…4

Brahmanand Swami says: make your life worthwhile by associating with such a Satpurush…5

(2)

Sant param hitkāri, jagat māhi…1
Prabhupad pragat karāvat priti, bharam mitāvat bhāri…2
Paramkrupālu sakal jivan par, harisam sab dukhhāri…3
Trigunātit firat tanu tyāgi, rit jagatse nyāri…4
Brahmānand kahe santki sobat, milat hai pragat Murāri…5

Meaning:

In this world, the Satpurush is our greatest benefactor…1

He takes us towards God and frees us from material illusions…2

He is compassionate towards every living being; He takes away all suffering…3

He is above the three *gunas*, and his ways are different from those of this world…4

Brahmânand Swami, the composer, says: the association of such a Satpurush is like meeting manifest God…5

5. Dhun

Rāma-Krishna Govind, jay jay Govind!
Hare Rāma Govind, jay jay Govind! 1
Nārāyan hare, Swāminārāyan hare!
Swāminārāyan hare, Swāminārāyan hare! 2
Krishnadev hare, jay jay Krishnadev hare!
Jay jay Krishnadev hare, jay jay Krishnadev hare! 3
Vāsudev hare, jay jay Vāsudev hare!
Jay jay Vāsudev hare, jay jay Vāsudev hare! 4
Vāsudev Govind jay jay Vāsudev Govind!
Jay jay Vāsudev Govind, jay jay Vāsudev Govind! 5
Rādhe Govind, jay Rādhe Govind!
Vrundāvanachandra, jay Rādhe Govind! 6
Mādhav Mukund, jay Mādhav Mukund!
Anandkand jay Mādhav Mukund! 7
Swāminārāyan! Swāminārāyan! Swāminārāyan!
Swāminārāyan! Swāminārāyan! Swāminārāyan!

6. Shri Swaminarayan Ashtakam

Anant-kotindu-raviprakāshe
dhāmnyaksharemurtimatāksharena
Sārdham sthitam muktaganāvrutam cha
Shri Swāminārāyanamānamāmi…1

I bow to Bhagwan Swaminarayan who is surrounded by innumerable *muktas* (liberated souls) and the eternal Aksharbrahman in his divine abode, Akshardham – which is as bright as infinite suns and moons. (1)

Brahmādi-samprārthanayā pruthivyām
jātam samuktam cha sahāksharam cha
Sarvāvatāreshvavatārinam tvām
Shri Swāminārāyanamānamām…2

I bow to Bhagwan Swaminarayan, the supreme incarnation who has descended on this earth with Aksharbrahman (Gunatitanand Swami), the divine abode, and the *muktas* (Gopalanand Swami and other liberated souls), after hearing the prayers of Brahma and other deities. (2)

Dushprāpyamanyai kathinairupāyai
samādhisaukhyam hathayogamukhyai
Nijāshritebhyo dadatam dayālum
Shri Swāminārāyanamānamāmi…3

I bow to Bhagwan Swaminarayan who has mercifully blessed his disciples by giving them the bliss of samadhi, which is extremely difficult to attain even by hatha yoga and other difficult *sadhanas*. (3)

Lokottarai bhaktajanānscharitrai
rāhlādayantam cha bhuvibhramantam
Yagnānscha tanvānamapārasatvam
Shri Swāminārāyanamānamāmi…4

I bow to Bhagwan Swaminarayan who travelled on this earth, performed many *yagnas*, accomplished many noble tasks and whose divine actions brought great joy to his disciples. (4)

Ekāntikam sthāpayitum dharāyām
dharmam prakurvantamamulyavārtā
Vachasudhāscha prakirantmurvyām
Shri Swāminārāyanamānamāmi…5

I bow to Bhagwan Swaminarayan, who to establish *ekantik* dharmaon earth, delivered inspiring sermons and showered nectar in the form of the Vachanamrut. (5)

Vishveshabhaktim sukarām vidhātum
bruhanti ramyāni mahitalesmin
Devālayānyāshu vinirmimānam
Shri Swāminārāyanamānamāmi…6

I bow to Bhagwan Swaminarayan, who speedily built beautiful, divine mandirs on this earth so that people can easily offer devotion to the Lord of all Creation – Paramatma Purushottam Narayan. (6)

Vināshakam sansrutibandhanānām
manushyakalyānkaram mahishtham
Pravartayantam bhuvi sampradāyam
Shri Swāminārāyanamānamāmi…7

I bow to Bhagwan Swaminarayan, who founded this great Swaminarayan Sampradaya on this earth, which has helped people in shattering the bondage of this world and which has delivered ultimate salvation to the people. (7)

Sadaiv Sārangpurasya ramye
sumandire hyaksharadhāmatulye
Sahāksharam muktayutam vasantam
Shri Swāminārāyanamānamāmi…8

I bow to Bhagwan Swaminarayan whose *murti* has been consecrated along with Aksharbrahman Gunatitanand Swami and *aksharmukta* Gopalanand Swami in the beautiful Sarangpur mandir, which is like Akshardham. (8)

7. Prarthana

Nirvikalp uttam ati, nischay tav Ghanshyām;
Māhātmyagnānyut bhakti tav, ekāntik sukhdhām…1
Mohime tav bhaktapano, tāme koi prakār;
Dosh na rahe koi jātko, suniyo Dharmakumār…2
Tumāro tav Hari bhaktako, droh kabu nahi hoy;
Ekāntik tav dāsko, dije samāgam moy…3
Nāth nirantar darsh tav, tav dāsanko dās;
Ehi māgu kari vinay Hari, sadā rākhiyo pās…4
He Krupālo! He Bhaktapte! Bhaktavatsal! suno bāt;
Dayāsindho! stavan kari, māgu vastu sāt…5
Sahajānand Mahārājke, sab satsangi sujān;
Tāku hoy dradh vartano, Shikshāpatri pramān…6
So Patri me atibade, niyam ekādash joy;
Tāki vigti kahat hu, suniyo sab chitt proy…7
Hinsā na karni jantuki, partriyā sangko tyāg;
Māns na khāvat madhyaku, pivat nahi badbhāg…8
Vidhvāku sparshat nahi, karat na ātmaghat;
Chori na karni kāhuki, kalank na kouku lagāt…9
Nindat nahi koy devku, bin khapto nahi khāt;
Vimukh jivake vadanse, kathā suni nahi jāt…10
Ehi (vidhi) dharmake niyamme, barto sab haridās;
Bhajo Shri Sahajānandpad, chhodi aur sab ās…11
Rahi ekādash niyamme, karo Shri Haripad prit;
Premānand kahe dhāmme, jāo nishank jag jit…12

Meaning:

Please grant me the highest level of faith in your divine form; may I develop unparalleled devotion towards you, together with knowledge of your glory (1).

O Maharaj! May I never perceive any faults in your devotees (2).

May I never malign you or your devotees. Please forever grant me the company of your spiritually enlightened devotee (3).

Please always grace me with your darshan and the darshan of your devotees. Please always keep me with you, that is my earnest request (4).

O Maharaj! You are merciful, compassionate, master and succour of your devotees! Please grant me the seven requests above (5).

Listen all devotees to the main codes of conduct Sahajanand Swami Maharaj has

prescribed in the Shikshapatri (6).

In the Shikshapatri, eleven main codes of conduct are described. I will give their details, so listen with attention (7).

Never harm any living being, do not associate with women not closely related to you; do not eat meat or drink intoxicating beverages (8).

Do not associate with widows, do not commit suicide; do not steal, do not falsely blame anyone (9).

Do not insult any deities, do not eat food prepared by inappropriate people, do not listen to discourses by non-believers (10).

These codes of conduct should be observed by all devotees, sadhus and householders; worship Shri Sahajanand Swami, forsaking all other wishes (11).

Live by these eleven codes and please Shri Hari;

Thus, says Premanand, you will without a doubt overcome worldly desires and attain Akshardham (12).

Shlokas To Be Sung While Offering Prostrations To God

Krupā karo muj upare, sukhnidhi Sahajānand,
Gun tamārā gāvvā, buddhi āpjo Sukhkand…1
Akshar Purushottam ahi pruthvi upar padhāriyā,
Anek jiva uddhārvā, manushyatan dhāri rahyā…2

Āvyā Akshardhāmthi avnimā, aishvarya mukto lai,
Shobhe Akshar sāth sundar chhabi, lāvanya tejomayi;
Kartā divya sadā rahe pragat je, sākār sarvopari,
Sahajānand krupālune nit namu, sarvāvatāri Hari.

Je chhe Akshardhām divya Harinu, mukto-Hari jyā vase,
Māyāpār kare anant jivane, je mokshanu dwār chhe;
Brahmāndo anutulya rom disatā, seve Parabrahmane,
E Mulākshar murtine namu sadā, Gunātitānandne.

Shrimannirgun-murti sundar tanu, je gnānvārtā kathe,
Je sarvagna, samast sādhugun chhe, māyā thaki mukta chhe;
Sarvaishvaryathi purna ashritjano-nā dosh tāle sadā, Evā Prāgji Bhaktarāj gurune preme namu sarvadā.

Jenu nām ratyā thaki malin, sankalpo samulā gayā,
Jene sharan thayā pachhi bhavtanā ferā virāmi gayā;
Jenu gān dasho dishe harijano, gāye ati harshthi,
Evā Yagnapurushdās tamne, pāye namu pritthi.

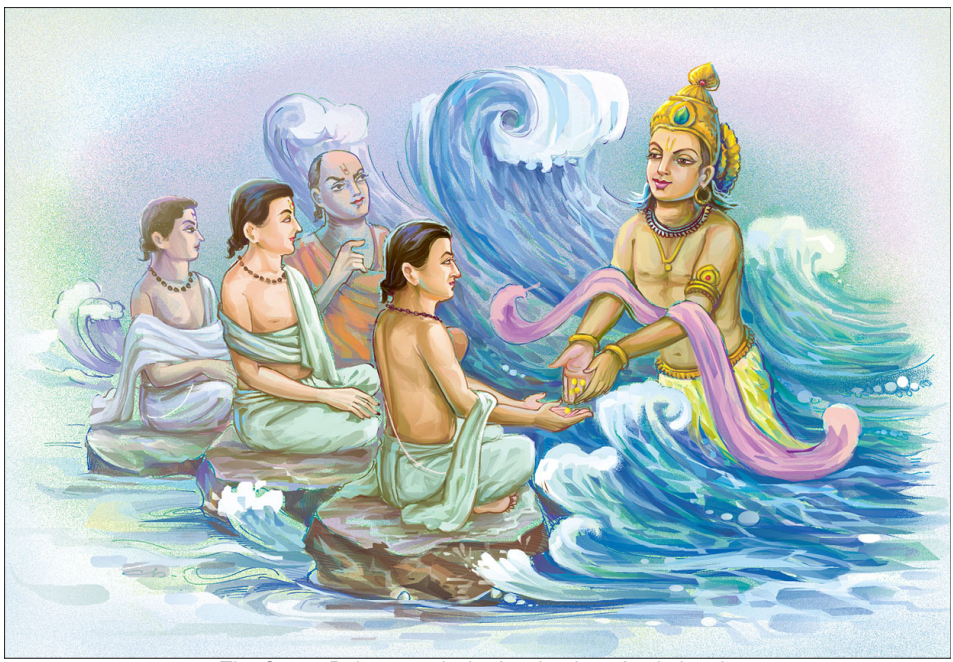
Vāni amrutthi bhari madhusami, sanjivani lokmā,

drashtimā bhari divyatā nirakhatā, sudivya bhakto badhā;
Haiye heta bharyu mithu jananishu, ne hasya mukhe vasyu,
Te Shri Gnānji Yogirāj gurune, nitye namu bhāvshu.

Shobho sādhugune sadā saral ne, jakte anāsakt chho,
Shāstriji guru Yogiji ubhayni, krupātanu pātra chho;
Dhāri dharmadhurā samudra sarkhā, gambhir gnāne ja chho,
Nārayānswarupdās gunine, snehe ja vandu aho.

Brahmarupe Shriharinā charanmā anurāgie,
Evi ja āshish dāsbhāve hastjodi māgie.

8. Ratnakar and the Four Brothers



The Ocean Deity rewards the four brothers for their unity

Once, there were four brothers who were very united, but extremely poor. Together they began to think about how to earn money. They had heard that the ocean was called Ratnakar ('maker of gems') because it contains so many gems. Together, they decided to worship the ocean to earn its favour. Then, they hoped, it would give them some gems and deliver them from poverty.

With this thought, they went to the seashore and began their austerities. In order to maximize the time spent in worship, they would begin right after their morning bath and prayers and eat only once a day. The four brothers divided the different tasks of preparing their daily meal amongst themselves. One brother would go into town and

beg for flour, while another would draw water from a well. The third brother would collect firewood, and the fourth would prepare the meal. Once their meal was prepared, they would all sit together and eat.

The four brothers performed very difficult austerities. Moreover, they worked in harmony and were never jealous of each other.

The Ocean was pleased with the united efforts of the four brothers. However, before he would fulfil their wish for wealth, the Ocean decided to test the unity of the four brothers.

One day, when all four brothers were engaged in their work, the Ocean assumed the form of a Brahmin and met each of them in turn. He first approached the brother who had gone to beg for flour. He tried to turn him against his brothers by saying, "I just met one of your brothers. Despite the fact that you are working so hard, he is saying bad things about you behind your back…" Before the Brahmin could say another word, the first brother retorted, "My brother would never say something like that."

With a downcast face, the Brahmin quickly left. Then the Brahmin approached each of the other three brothers individually and repeated the same thing. They all responded in the same way.

The Ocean was satisfied with the bond of unity among the four brothers. Their behaviour made him confident that if he gave them wealth they would neither fight amongst themselves for it, nor waste it. So he appeared before them and rewarded them with a handful of priceless jewels.

We all know that 'where there is unity, there is peace'. Moreover, Muktanand Swami has said in his kirtan, '*Thai ekmanâ prabhune bhajiye*', meaning, 'let us become united and worship God'. Yogiji Maharaj also used to teach us to always keep '*Samp, suradhabhav, ane ekta*' – 'unity, friendship, and oneness'.

Only if we keep unity amongst ourselves and refrain from saying bad things about each other will God be pleased.

9. Devji Bhakta of Nenpur

During the course of their *vicharan* Kripanand Swami and Gunatitanand Swami arrived at Devjibhai's house in Nenpur. Devjibhai was a dedicated devotee of Shriji Maharaj. When the sadhus arrived, Devjibhai welcomed them and arranged for them to stay the night. He offered them something to eat, however, they politely refused. Devjibhai then sat with the sadhus to listen to their spiritual discourses.

Devjibhai listened while the sadhus recalled Shriji Maharaj's divine episodes. Soon the clock struck midnight. Devjibhai suggested, "Swami! You have walked a great distance to my house. You must be tired, so please rest."

Devjibhai then began to walk towards his farm. As Gunatitanand Swami and Kripanand Swami prepared to retire for the night, they noticed that Devjibhai was going somewhere. Wondering where he was going so late at night, they asked, "When will you go to sleep?"

Devjibhai casually explained, “Swami! I will make a round at my farm and then sit and do 200 *malas*. Then, Sleep will come and stand at a distance from me. It will come to me when I call for it.” Hearing this, the sadhus were greatly surprised.

Devjibhai was an *ekantik* devotee of Maharaj. Once, when Maharaj was doing *mala* in the assembly, Sura Khachar asked out of curiosity, “Maharaj! When we do *mala* we chant your name, but whose name do you chant when you do *mala*?”

To everyone’s suprise Maharaj answered, “I chant the name of my devotees.”

“Which devotees?” asked Sura Khachar. He started to suggest names, one after another.

“It’s true that they are all devotees, but they are not mentioned as I turn the beads of my *mala*.” Maharaj then turned one bead of his *mala* and announced, “Devjibhai.” Thus, Devjibhai was such a great devotee that Shriji Maharaj considered him worthy of remembering when he turned the *mala*.

As a result of Devjibhai’s company, his wife was just as devout as him.

Devjibhai had a son, who was gifted with the constant darshan of Shriji Maharaj. When his son grew older, marriage requests started to pour in. Devjibhai and his wife, however, felt, “If we get him to marry, he will lose his ability to constantly enjoy the bliss of Maharaj’s darshan.”

Around that time, by Maharaj’s wish, their son unexpectantly died. Devjibhai and his wife took comfort in the knowledge that Maharaj had taken their son to Akshardham, his divine abode.

Concerned that sympathizers would come to their house to mourn, Devjibhai suggested to his wife, “If we stay here, then our relatives will continue to come to us to grieve and express their pain. Instead, I’ll go to our farm, while you take a pot of ghee and go to meet Shriji Maharaj. Offer it to Maharaj and wish him ‘Jai Swaminarayan’ on my behalf.” She readily agreed.

Soon after, she left for Gadhada with a pot full of ghee balanced on her head. When she arrived, Maharaj was eating lunch on a porch in Dada Khacher’s *darbar*. She carefully placed the pot of ghee on the floor and bowed to Maharaj from a distance. Shriji Maharaj recognized her and asked about her husband, “Is Patel happy?”

“Maharaj! Patel was happy, but he is even happier now,” replied Devjibhai’s wife.

Although Shriji Maharaj knew about her son’s death, he asked on behalf of everyone else, “What happened? Please tell us.”

As she narrated the events in detail, Laduba, Jivuba, and Harji Thakkar all stood listening attentively. When she had finished, Maharaj related, “Look at this devotee’s understanding. She experiences happiness even though her young son has unexpectedly died. Whereas here, ever since five-year-old Hiruba (Panchuba’s daughter) passed away, everyone has been grieving. They have been so overcome with sorrow, that they have even stopped preparing my *thal*.”

Shriji Maharaj continued, “If anyone should lament, it should be Harji Thakkar, since Hiruba was his mother in her previous birth. Because she had a desire to offer me food, she was born in this *darbar* and passed away soon after feeding me milk and *puris*.” Laduba and Jivuba’s grief disappeared and they all mentally bowed with great

respect to Devjibhai's wife.

10. Guru-Shishya

Guru

In the word 'guru', 'gu' means darkness, and 'ru' means light. A guru is someone who removes darkness, in the form of ignorance, and replaces it with light in the form of truth. All souls are enveloped in *maya's* dark veil of ignorance. As a result they are ignorant of their true identity, vain and possessive. However, a guru is someone who is never affected by *maya*. Shriji Maharaj reveals in the Vedras: "The guru is Brahman."

While playing *ras* uring the Pushpadolotsav festival in Sarangpur, Shriji Maharaj recited Kabir's poem "Sadguru khele Vasant" and asked, "Who is the Sadguru that Kabir is referring to in his poem?"

"You are the Sadguru that he's talking about," answered the sadhus.

Maharaj then touched Gunatitanand Swami's chest with the end of his stick and revealed, "The Sadguru that Kabir is referring to is Gunatitanand Swami. He is my abode – Brahmadham (Akshardham)."

The Brahmaswarup Satpurush, who is *gunatit*, that is, beyond the influence of the three *gunas* – *sattva*, *rajas*, and *tamas* – is the only true guru. The guru is the gateway through which one can reach Shriji Maharaj. The guru purifies the soul by making it *brahmarup,* free from *maya*, and attaches it in service of God.The Kathopanishad guides, "Arise! Awake! Attain the Satpurush and the knowledge of the soul."The Shrimad Bhagvat also advises that an aspirant should go to a guru who is *brahmanishtha* – always engrossed in God, and *shrotriya* – knows the true meaning of the shastras.

Kabirji has also said, *"Guru Govind dono khade kisko lāgu pāy,balihāri gurudevki, jine Govind diyo batāy."*

"If both God and guru are standing in front of me,who would I bow down to first? I would bow to my guru first, since my guru led me to realize God."

There is only one Mul Aksharbrahman. He is the true guru and Shriji Maharaj is manifest on this earth through him. Shriji Maharaj identified Mul Aksharbrahman Gunatitanand Swami as his first successor. After him the lineage continued through Bhagatji Maharaj, Shastriji Maharaj, and Yogiji Maharaj. They were all Gunatit and were in constant communion with Shriji Maharaj.

Today, Shastri Narayanswarupdasji (Pramukh Swami Maharaj) is the true, Gunatit guru through whom Shriji Maharaj is present on earth. By surrendering to him, we attain divine association with Shriji Maharaj.

The guru represents the ideal of *upasana* and bhakti to God that a devotee strives to attain. Thus, the guru should be perfect, since only then does the devotee attain that state. A true guru is one who perfectly observes the vows of *nishkam, nirlobh, nisswad, nirman* and *nissneh*, and steadfastly serves God.

In addition, the purity of a guru can be assessed in three ways: by observing the life

of the guru's guru, the guru's own behaviour, and the character and conduct of the guru's disciples. In the Shrimad Bhagvat, Rishabhdevji says, "One who is unable to redeem souls from the circle of life and death does not qualify to be a guru."

Only someone who fully possesses dharma, wisdom, renunciation, and bhakti with an understanding of God's glory; lives by the philosophy of Brahman and Parabrahban; and is God-realized is worthy of being a guru. When selecting a guru, we should be aware of and search for these qualitites.

Shishya (Disciple)

We have seen the attributes of a true guru. In the same way, a disciple should also bear the qualities of a true disciple. The disciple must have great love for his guru, and have utmost faith and trust in his words. As Arjun says to Shri Krishna, *"Shishyaste'ham, sādhi mām twām prapannam."* – "I am your disciple. I dedicate myself to you; please show me the way." Such total surrender must come from the heart of a disciple.

Satyakam Jabali went to his guru's ashram to study *brahmavidya*. The guru gave him four hundred cows and told him to return when they had increased to a thousand. Obeying the guru's command, Satyakam sincerely served the cows. When they had increased to a thousand, the brilliant lustre of the knowledge of Brahman shone on his face. By his guru's grace Satyakam thus attained the knowledge of Brahman.

Bhagatji Maharaj also surrendered totally to the wishes of Gunatitanand Swami, "*Tan kari nākhe re, guru vachane chure-churā"* – "Pound the body to dust on the words of the guru." In this way he earned the inner blessings of Gunatitanand Swami. Shastriji Maharaj once instructed Yogiji Maharaj, "Yogi, you should feed these labourers and devotees daily." Shastriji Maharaj never had to remind him again of this as Yogiji Maharaj unfailingly carried out this order for forty years.

The guru is the soul of the disciple. One who lives according to the commands of the guru is described as *atmarup*. The disciple becomes *brahmarup* with the guru's grace, but still maintains reverence towards the guru.

Gunatitanand Swami often said, "If the guru is seated in darkness and can be seen only by the light of the disciple, even then the disciple should feel that the light is given to him by his guru." This is the height of veneration towards the guru. Yogiji Maharaj, even though he spread this Satsang so widely, always kept Shastriji Maharaj at the fore.

The scriptures say: *"Sampradāyo gurukramah"* – "A Sampradaya is one which has a succession of gurus." The fourth successor of Gunatitanand Swami is His Divine Holiness Swami Narayanswarupdasji (Pramukh Swami Maharaj), who is our guru. Our guru is ideal and perfect but one has to, with his grace, strive to become an ideal disciple.

11. Atmanand Swami

Maharaj regarded the sadhus initiated by Ramanand Swami as his *gurubhais* – brothers of the same guru – and respectfully called them 'Bhai'. After Bhai Ramdas Swami passed away to Dham, Maharaj appointed Atmanand Swami to Bhai Ramdas Swami's seat. Maharaj then addressed him as either 'Bhai Swami' or 'Bhai Atmanand Swami'. He is also known as 'Vrudhatmanand Swami' in the Sampradaya.

Bhai Swami, a native of the Marwad region, was born in 1743 CE (Samvat 1799) in a village named Untwal. To attain God he performed many pilgrimages, austerities, and other spiritual endeavours. In old age he had Maharaj's darshan in Meghpur, a village in the Sorath district of Gujarat. Immediately, Bhai Atmanand Swami developed faith in Maharaj and took refuge under him.

He was resolute in following all of Maharaj's commands, both minor and major. Maharaj often gave many difficult observances, yet Bhai Atmanand Swami followed each of them to the letter. As a result, he was respectfully known as *vachanmurti* – an embodiment of Shriji Maharaj's words.

Once, Maharaj told his sadhus to observe *khatras*, a difficult form of fasting in which all the six types of taste are avoided. Six months later he ended the austerity, but Bhai Atmanand Swami was unaware of it and so continued the fast. He stopped only when some time later he met Maharaj and was told that the vow had been revoked.

Bhai Atmanand Swami had great disregard for his body. His body was covered with much hair, but he would never scrub when he bathed. As a result, small insects gradually infested his entire body. Bhai Swami disassociated himself from his body to the extent that when some insect fell from his body, he would carefully pick it up and place it back onto his body saying, "Here take it. This body is your food." When Maharaj came to know of Bhai Swami's detached mindset, he called him to the assembly and had a barber shave off all the hair from Bhai Swami's body. Maharaj then made him bathe in hot water and instructed him to take care of his body.

However, Bhai Swami's natural tendency was to not care for his own body. Once, he developed scabies throughout his entire body. Despite his condition, he had to travel from one town to another. Gunatitanand Swami was with him in his service. They had arranged for a bullock-cart to take them, however, the cart driver refused to take them all the way to the other town. Disregarding his troublesome condition, Bhai Swami reasoned, "My name is Atmanand; today, let me truly be *atmanand*," and began to walk. As he marched forward, the boils on his body began to burst one by one and pus began to flow from them. his condition was unbearable. After they finally arrived at the village, Gunatitianand Swami wiped the pus off Bhai Atmanand Swami's body and bathed him.

Seeing Atmanand Swami's elevated spiritual state, Shriji Maharaj would often express his pleasure towards him and gift him with garlands and *prasad*.

As instructed by Maharaj, Bhai Atmanand Swami stayed in Dholera. At that time, he was over a hundred years old. Bhai Swami had immense affection for Shriji Maharaj. After Maharaj returned to Akshardham, Bhai Atmanand Swami stayed at Vagad. Becuase Gunatitanand Swami travelled with him and served him, Bhai Atmanand Swami had developed great respect for him as well.

Bhai Atmanand Swami once went to Nadiad with Acharya Raghuvirji Maharaj, where he accompanied him on a *padhramani* to a devotee's home. There, chairs had been arranged for the elderly sadhus to sit on. However, Atmanand Swami didn't approve of the way the chairs were arranged, because it compromised the sadhus' vow of celibacy. The next day, he refused to go on the home visits and sent a message to the Acharya, "Our Lord made us cover our eyes with a veil, whereas you make us stand in the midst of ladies. I will only go to these *padhramanis*, if you remove the chairs."

Acharya Maharaj then made arrangements so that the sadhus' vows would not be violated. Bhai Swami was resolute in upholding his dharma. He would often say, "Desires and dharma don't mix. If you want to uphold dharma, then you must renounce all desires; and if you want to fulfil desires, then dharma has to be sacrificed."

When Bhai Atmanand Swami was 116 years old, he resided at Aniyali, a villiage near Vagad. Once, when Gunatitanand Swami arrived in Aniyali he met Atmanand Swami and asked, "Why doesn't Maharaj come to take you to Akshardham?"

Bhai Swami asked, "I have been thinking the same thing. What do I have left to do?"

Gunatitanand Swami was aware of what Bhai Atmanand Swami had left to understand. By narrating episodes in which Maharaj himself had revealed his supreme greatness, Gunatitanand Swami explained that Shriji Maharaj was supreme God. He explained, "Maharaj is greater than all the avatars."

Delighted by Gunatitanand Swami's explanation, Bhai Swami revealed, "Up until now, I understood Shriji Maharaj as being just another avatar. However, by listening to your discourse today I now understand Shriji Maharaj's supreme form."

Bhai Swami also realized the glory of Gunatitanand Swami. In the past, Atmanand Swami would give *prasad* from his wooden bowl to Gunatitanand Swami. On this day, however, he insisted and took *prasad* from Gunatitanand Swami's wooden bowl.

Gunatitanand Swami soon left for Botad. Then on 9 June 1860 (Jeth *vad* 6, Vikram Samvat 1916) Bhai Atmanand Swami passed away to Akshardham.

During his lifetime, Bhai Swami's devotion to Maharaj was chiefly seen in his strict adherence to Maharaj's commands. However, he also expressed his devotion to Maharaj by writing a text narrating Shriji Maharaj's divine incidents.

12. Kashidas of Bochasan

Shriji Maharaj promises Kashidas and his mother that a mandir will be built in Bochasan in the future

Soon after Kashidas became a *satsangi* his son passed away. Then his bullock died, and some time later his milch buffalo also faced a similar fate. As a result of all these deaths, his relatives became frustrated. They tried to convince Kashidas to give up Satsang, but he refused. He had unflinching faith in Shriji Maharaj.

Kashidas, a native of Bochasan, first met Shriji Maharaj when Maharaj was travelling as Nilkanth Varni. Later, while Kashidas was on a pilgrimage to Dwarika, he met several of Maharaj's sadhus, who revealed Shriji Maharaj's glory. Thereafter, Kashidas went to Gadhada, took refuge under Shriji Maharaj and was initiated by him into Satsang.

Once, Maharaj celebrated a *shakotsav* at Sura Khachar's *darbar* in Loya. Devotees had arrived from far away to take part in the festivities. Kashidas had also arrived with a group of devotees. Kashidas and other devotees watched as Shriji Maharaj himself busily cooked the vegetables and added the spices for the main meal. While he was cooking, Maharaj wiped his turmeric-covered hands on his dhoti. Because of the heat, he was drenched in sweat. Seeing Maharaj's fallible appearance, the devotees who had come with Kashidas began to doubt Shriji Maharaj's divinity.

After feeding all the devotees, Shriji Maharaj held an assembly. In his discourse, Maharaj said, "What should we think of someone who, after making an arduous pilgrimage to Kashi, neither takes a bath in the Ganga nor drinks its water?"

Kashidas immediately knew the intent behind Shriji Maharaj's words. By doubting

Maharaj's divinity the devotees that came with Kashidas had failed to attain the merits of their pilgrimage. Realizing their mistake the devotees shed their doubts of Shriji Maharaj's greatness and were convinced of his divinity and glory.

Due to Kashidas's affection and firm attachment towards him, Shriji Maharaj visited Bochasan 32 times. While Kashidas had firm faith in Shriji Maharaj, Kashidas's father offered devotion to other deities. However, he slowly realized Kashidas's greatness and then joined the Satsang.

Kashidas's faith and devoted service often earned him Maharaj's blessings. Kashidas dealt in the cultivation of indigo. Innumerable small insects bred and died in the water given to the indigo shrubs. Thus a lot of *himsa* was committed. However, other crops did not grow in that part of the country, so what else could he do? Kashidas was helpless. Shriji Maharaj blessed him, "Seven kinds of crops will grow in abundance in your field." Maharaj made Kashidas remove all the indigo shrubs. Crops soon began to grow in abundance in Kashidas's fields and he began to earn a lot of money.

Kashidas constantly rejoiced in having attained manifest God. He wished that his relatives would also develop faith in Shriji Maharaj so that they too would attain ultimate redemption. Once, on Kashidas's invitation, Shriji Maharaj came to Bochasan. A special *mafo* was prepared and Kashidas took Shriji Maharaj from village to village, to the homes of all his relatives. As a result his relatives also joined the Satsang.

Kashidas used to trade in tobacco as well. However, instead of selling his crop in the local market, Kashidas used to take his carts full of tobacco to Gadhada to sell. He would stay there and enjoy the company of Shriji Maharaj. When Maharaj would ask him to go home he would cleverly say, "The tobacco is not yet sold and the collection of the dues is not yet complete." In this way, he would use his business as a reason to extend his time in Shriji Maharaj's company.

Once he suffered a great loss in his tobacco business. The creditors lodged a complaint against him at the court in Kheda. The court decided that if Kashidas did not pay his dues to the creditors, he should be jailed for six months.

Kashidas was not in a position to pay. He had to go to jail in Kheda. In jail he thought, "How will I be able to do puja without a bath? How will I be able to eat? I won't be able to have the darshan of Maharaj at the festival in Gadhada." With these thoughts, his mind was in turmoil.

The next morning a guard brought him breakfast. However, Kashidas expressed his wish to take a bath. Knowing him to be a pious man, the guards took Kashidas, his hands bound in chains, to the River Vatrak. Kashidas remembered Shriji Maharaj and plunged into the river. On coming out of the water, Kashidas saw no chains on his hands or legs. On looking around he found himself in Gadhada instead of Kheda! Maharaj had miraculously brought him from Kheda to Gadhada through the river. Kashidas ran straight to Maharaj.

Meanwhile at the River Vatrak, the police waited for a long time but Kashidas did not come out of the water. Thinking that he had drowned they returned to the prison. In Gadhada, Shriji Maharaj told Kashidas to stay there for six months. Then, Shriji Maharaj sent Kashidas back home with his full blessings. Having heard of this miracle

the creditors were extremely surprised. Considering Kashidas to be a true devotee, they pardoned him of all his debts.

Once Kashidas's house was on fire. But Shriji Maharaj, who at the time was in Gadhada, protected him. In Gadhada Maharaj was sitting in front of some devotees. All of a sudden Maharaj started rubbing his hands. After some time, blisters were seen on his hands. All began to ask, "What is this?" Maharaj replied, "Kashidas's house was on fire, so I went there to extinguish it."

Some time later, Shriji Maharaj started building a mandir in Vartal. He sent a few sadhus to Vadodara to collect the *murtis* of Lakshmi-Narayan from Amichand Seth. While the sadhus were returning with the *murtis,* there was heavy rain and the cart got stuck in the mud near the town of Bhalaj. People from Bochasan were called and the cart was pulled out. The *murtis* were then kept at the house of Kashidas.

Before the *murti-pratishtha* ceremony in Vartal, Shriji Maharaj himself went to Bochasan to collect the *murtis*. Naniba, Kashidas's mother, served *kansar* to Maharaj and requested him to consecrate the *murtis* in Bochasan by erecting a mandir in the village. Maharaj held Kashidas's hands and promised, "My *murti* will be established here along with that of my Akshardham."

Thereafter, on many occasions, Shriji Maharaj blessed Kashidas, "I shall erect a great mandir in Bochasan."[1]

In Samvat 1918, Kashidas passed away to Akshardham. His son, Desaibhai, specially called Acharya Shri Raghuvirji Maharaj and Aksharbrahman Gunatitanand Swami to Bochasan for Kashidas's last rites. Desaibhai served the Acharya and Gunatitanand Swami for 17 day.

13. Prayer

Vandan karie Prabhu bhāv dhari,
Swāmi Gunātit Shri Sahajānandji… Vandan
Āp Prabhu chho Dhāmnā Dhāmi,
Balvantā bahunāmi Hari… Vandan…1
Jiva anantnā. mokshane arthe,
Anādi Akshar sāth lai… Vandan…2
Purushottam Nārāyan pote,
Pragatyā mānav deh dhari… Vandan…3
Swāmi Gunātit anādi Akshar,
Purushottam Sahajānandji… Vandan…4
Yagnapurushmā akhand rahine,
Upāsanā shuddh pragat kari… Vandan…5
Bhakti eja amāru jivan,
Dejo rome rom bhari… Vandan…6
He Bhaktavatsal Karunāsāgar,
Vinanti karu kar jodi Hari… Vandan…7

Hetu rahit bhakti tav charane,
Dejo tan man dhanthi Hari… Vandan…8

14. Ladhibai of Bhuj

Ladhibai was a disciple of Ramanand Swami. After Ramanand Swami passed away, Shriji Maharaj came to Bhuj and sent a devotee to call Ladhibai. The devotee told her, "Sahajanand Swami has come here and is calling you for his darshan."

Ladhibai replied, "For me, Ramanand Swami is the only Swami. So I don't wish to come for darshan." Again Maharaj sent a message, "You are a disciple of Ramanand Swami and I am a disciple of Ramanand Swami. So we are fellow disciples. Do come and see me."

So, Ladhibai came and met Shriji Maharaj. After the meeting, on her way home she passed a mandir of Raghunathji. She went in to have darshan of the *murtis*. There, to her great surprise, she saw Shriji Maharaj in the *murti* of Raghunathji. On having this divine darshan, she firmly resolved that Maharaj was God.

As Shriji Maharaj was a disciple of Ramanand Swami, Ladhibai used to call him 'Bhai' (brother). Once, Ladhibai invited Shriji Maharaj for lunch. Maharaj said, "I only eat *rotlas* and chillies."

Ladhibai laid a low wooden table and arranged a seat for Maharaj. She served *rotlo* and a bowl of chillies. After a while, she brought a plate of *shiro* and *puri*, and removed the *rotlo* and bowl of chillies. Shriji Maharaj affectionately began to eat the *shiro* and *puri*. Ladhibai sat before Maharaj with folded hands. Shriji Maharaj glanced at her and she entered samadhi.

In samadhi, she saw Shriji Maharaj seated on a divine throne in Akshardham. All around Maharaj, innumerable released souls were standing in his service. Even Ramanand Swami was in Maharaj's service. Seeing this, Ladhibai was surprised. Ramanand Swami rebuked Ladhibai, "Why do you address Shriji Maharaj impolitely? He who dines at your home is sitting on this throne. He is the ultimate reality – Purna Purushottam Narayan – the supreme cause of all incarnations. Explain this to Sundarji Suthar and Gangaram the wrestler as well."

With another glance, Shriji Maharaj awakened Ladhibai. She came out of the trance. Before she could regain full consciousness Maharaj requested, "Please give me some more *shiro*." With great pleasure, Ladhibai served *shiro* to Shriji Maharaj. Later, she described her samadhito all the devotees, and explained the supremacy of Shriji Maharaj to them all.

Ladhibai had firmly decided to follow whatever order Shriji Maharaj gave. To test this resolve, Shriji Maharaj once asked her, "Ladhibai, put on a dress like a married woman and apply a red *chandlo* of *kumkum* on your forehead. Then pass through the centre of the town with a pot full of water on your head and bring it here."

Though Ladhibai was a widow and, according to social customs, could not dress like a married woman, she put on such clothes and carried a pot full of water on her head

through the town singing devotional songs. Seeing this, somebody sarcastically asked, “Ladhi, whom have you married?”

Ladhibai, in full excitement replied, “Purushottam Narayan.” She came to Shriji Maharaj, after passing through the busy market area. Shriji Maharaj was extremely pleased and blessed her.

Once, she came to Gadhada to attend the Holi festival. At that time, Zamkuba of Udaipur had also come there to devote the rest of her life to the service of God. Shriji Maharaj gave her white clothes to wear and renamed her ‘Mataji’. Shriji Maharaj sent Mataji to Bhuj with a recommendation to Ladhibai. Thereafter, they both spent their time in the service and devotion of Bhagwan Swaminarayan .

Later in life, Ladhibai wished to leave the world and go to Akshardham. Mataji also wished to accompany her. So Ladhibai told her, “Go ahead and go to Dham first; I shall follow you.” And that is what happened. In the presence of many onlookers, first Mataji passed away chanting the name of Shriji Maharaj, and following her, Ladhibai too left her body for Dham.

15. Dubli Bhatt

Dubli Bhatt presents his entire savings to Shriji Maharaj

“Welcome Bhattji,” said Shriji Maharaj greeting Dubli Bhatt. The assembly of devotees was stunned. The assembly was full of Darbarswho had big turbans and long, thick moustaches. Funds were being collected for the Gadhada mandir. Everybody was donating according to his capacity. Then Bhattji entered the assembly. Shriji Maharaj welcomed him and those seated in the assembly made way for him.

Dubli Bhatt was old and slim. Dressed in torn clothes and a worn-out turban, he came trembling to Shriji Maharaj.

He prostrated at the feet of Maharaj. Shriji Maharaj held his hand and raised him up. Smiling, yet apprehensive, Bhattji took off his turban. He untied the knot from one end of the tattered turban and put one paisa (*dokdo*) – one hundredth part of a rupee – at the feet of Shriji Maharaj. In the same way he untied twelve more knots and, in total, put thirteen paise at the feet of Shriji Maharaj. "Maharaj, I offer these in the service of Gopinathji," choked with emotion Bhattji requested Shriji Maharaj to accept his donation. Seeing the love of this devotee, Shriji Maharaj was extremely pleased and loudly called out, "Glory to Gopinath Maharaj!"

The Darbarsenthusiastically took up the call but immediately began to stare at one another. Everybody was surprised. Sura Khachar could not resist asking Shriji Maharaj, "Maharaj, what was this triumphant call for?"

"Our Gadhada mandir is now complete," Maharaj replied.

"But what did this Bhattji give?"

"Thirteen paise." Shriji Maharaj raised his hand and showed the donation to everybody.

"But is this amount sufficient for the mandir to be completed?"

Maharaj explained, "You are all people with means. You have horses and cattle for farming. Some of you have donated a thousand rupees and some have given two thousand rupees, but not everything. This devotee does not possess either a house in the village or a piece of land to farm. He earns his livelihood by performing religious rites for the people. Whatever little he has collected has been offered at my feet. When devotees with such dedicated and devout feelings offer their all, I feel that the work for the mandir is over."

This Dubli Bhatt stayed at Mota Gokharwala, but was originally a native of Chandgadh. He performed religious rites for a living. His real name was Ranchhodji Maharaj. But he was known as Dubli Bhatt since he was very weak, both physically and financially. Nonetheless, he had unflinching faith in Maharaj.

Once, he visited the house of his daughter's father-in-law. In the morning, after taking a bath, as per his daily routine, he sat for *mansi puja* in front of the *murti* of Shriji Maharaj. However, his relative had come under the influence of some evil company. So in the form of a jest, he took away the *murti* and replaced it with a shoe. When Bhattji came out of meditation, he saw the shoe and not the *murti*. He spoke, "Who is so blind as to place a shoe in place of the *murti*?" And immediately the father-in-law of his daughter became blind. Everybody realized the sincerity of Bhattji's devotion.

Once Shriji Maharaj expressed his pleasure towards him by giving him a golden ring and wristlet as a gift. Due to his devotion to Maharaj he did not sell the ring or wristlet for money, which he desperately needed, but instead kept them as sacred mementoes of Shriji Maharaj. This ring and wristlet are still with his descendants.

16. Vrat and Utsav

"Utsavapriyāhā khalu mānavāhā" – mankind is fond of festivals. Accordingly, to help bring joy amid the ups and downs of life on earth and to attain heavenly bliss, the ancient seers of India have prescribed numerous days for austerities and festivities throughout the Indian calendar. These special occasions can be separated into three types: *vrat*, *parva,* and *utsav*. Though *vrat*, *parva* and *utsav* differ from one another, they also have much in common.

Shriji Maharaj greatly encouraged this Indian tradition of festivals. He joyously celebrated these festivals with grandeur and sanctified these *vrats*, *parvas* and *utsavs* by associating with them personally. In those days the true form of festivals had been distorted. People viewed them only as fairs where many gathered and dispersed after merriment. Immoral behaviour was seen during sacred festivals like Holi. Superstitious rituals were practised blindly.

Shriji Maharaj transformed these observances and festivals and renamed them *samaiyas* – celebrations. During such celebrations, he gave prime importance to the darshan of the deities (*murtis*), darshan and company of himself and his followers, and participation in spiritual discourses. He turned these festivals from misguided fairs into divine gatherings. Sadguru Nishkulanand Swami describes this transformation in the Bhaktachintamani, Chapter 77.

"Jem anya lok thai bhelā, tem samajsho mā eh lilā."

"Don't misunderstand *samaiyas* for fairs wherein great numbers of people gather together for mere merriment."

"Pan jāne, ajāne, je jan, karshe Mahāprabhunā darshan,
Vali sunashe lilā charitra, te nar thashe nishchay pavitra."

"If knowingly or unknowingly, anyone has the darshan or hears the divine stories of our Mahaprabhu (God) he will certainly become pure."

Shriji Maharaj also performed *yagnas* on a large scale in which thousands of Brahmins were served food. Thousands of followers were invited to the celebrations of Hari Jayanti, Janmashtmi and other festivals.

Maharaj has stated the purpose behind organizing these large gatherings in Vachanamrut, Gadhada I 3:

"That is why I perform grand Vishnu-yags; annually celebrate Janmashtmi, Ekadashi and other observances; and gather *brahmacharis*, sadhus and *satsangis* on these occasions. After all, even if a sinner remembers these occasions at the time of his death, he will also attain the abode of God."

Shriji Maharaj arranged these congregations to help devotees remember his divine form. There are other benefits to celebrating these festivals as well. Discourses during such functions consolidate faith and understanding. By attending these festivals, one learns to adjust to living in a group and making do with whatever facilities are

provided. Devotees are given an opportunity to celebrate with old friends and form bonds with new devotees. During the birthday celebrations of God or his holy Sadhu, our minds are purified by recalling their divine episodes.

Now we will take a look at some of the different forms of *vrat, parva,* and *utsav*.

Vrat: *Sattvagun* is predominant in *vrats*, i.e., religious observances. The other two *gunas* are subordinate. Vows are observed to attain spiritual strength and purify the *atma*. One who undertakes religious observances as prescribed by the scriptures becomes happy in this world and attains the abode of the gods after death. However, vows performed without any worldly desire and with the single motive of pleasing God, bring *moksha* – i.e. eternal service at the feet of the God.

Vrat in general denotes fasting. Fasting helps to cure physical illnesses and also nourishes the *atma* with spiritual strength. The shastras prescribe a number of *vrats*. Fasting every month on the days of Hari Jayanti *(nom), ekadashi,* etc. are regular *vrats*. Observances such as *chandrayan* are for the atonement of sins. *Vrats* such as *Vat-Savitri* are done for fulfilment of wishes. There are also other obervances to be undertaken in *adhik mas* and at other special times of the year.

Parva: *Rajogun* dominates in *parva*. The other two *gunas* are subordinate. *Parvas* are observed in mandirs. They come at definite times. The birthday celebrations of God and his holy Sadhuare considered *parvas*. Eclipses, *sankrant*, bathing in a holy river and KumbhMelaare all *parvas*. Fasts can be observed individually whereas, generally, in *parvas* many people get together. They enjoy meeting one another and celebrate the *parva* together.

Utsav (Festivals): *Utsav* is a common word used to include *vrats* and *parvas*. These are public festivals and *tamogun* is predominant. Holi, Dashera, etc. are such public festivals. Millions of people get together. Navratri in Gujarat, Durga puja in West Bengal, Ganesh Chaturthi in Maharashtra, etc. are all large *utsavs*.

The Meanings Behind Festivals and Observances

The above religious observances and festivals are celebrated at definite times of the year. Every occasion has a special story associated with it. Goswami Vitthalnathji – the son of Shri Vallabhacharya, founder of the Vaishnav Sampradaya – has prescribed specific days for every *vrat* and *utsav*. In the Shikshapatri (verses 81, 82), Shriji Maharaj has accepted them. Also, Shriji Maharaj has given equal importance to the celebration of festivals of all Hindu faiths and deities (Shikshapatri 79). Shriji Maharaj has specified that the festivals of Ekadashi, Shivaratri, Ramnavmi, Krishna Jayanti, Ganesh Chaturthi, Vaman Jayanti, Nrusinh Jayanti, etc. should all be observed. He has taught us to show reverence to all incarnations and *devas*. Since he is *antaryami* (indweller) in all the avatars and *devas*, they should be considered to be his own manifestations. Celebrations of these festivals have been arranged by Shriji Maharaj himself and so are of great importance.

In the Satsangijivan shastra (Chapters 55-61, Canto 5), Maharaj describes the annual festivals and *vrats* in his own words. Here, Maharaj has given open invitations for all to attend the Hari Jayanti and Prabodhini Ekadashi festivals every year. Also, on every celebration, the *murtis* of the deities are bathed with *panchamrut* – a mixture of milk, curds, honey, ghee and sugar – and finally with clean water.

The Hindu calendar year begin with the month of Kartik, so the annual calendar of *vrats* and festivals are described in sequence from Kartik.

Annakut (Kartik sud 1): New Year's Day

The Vikram Samvat year starts from this day. King Bali surrendered everything to God on this day. Pleased with his total surrender, God asked everybody to perform Bali *pujan* on this day every year.

The cowherds of Vraj used to worship Indra. Shri Krishna told them, "Our wealth is due to this Mt. Govardhan. So we should offer worship to it, instead of Indra." Thus, Govardhan puja is also performed on this day every year. People make a small mountain of mud, to symbolize Mount Govardhan, and perform puja. Later on this Govardhan puja took the form of *annakut*.

An *annakut* of various vegetarian food items is offered to the deities in every mandir. Certain vegetables and food items which grow during the four months of the rainy season and which cannot be eaten during these months are first offered to the deities on this day. Only then can these foods be eaten. Devotees fast from the early morning and eat only after the deities have been offered food at midday. Disciples in every town or village visit the mandir in the early morning and seek blessings from the sadhus to strengthen *agna* and *upasana* in their lives and attain physical, mental and financial happiness. Cows are also worshipped in the morning.

Ekadashi

The origin of the Ekadashi fast is described in the Purans. God was asleep with his ten *indriyas* and mind introverted. At that opportune time, Murdanav, son of the demonNadijangh, came to fight with God. To overcome the threat, a young maiden emerged from the light of the eleven *indriyas* of the Lord. Murdanav was attracted by her beauty and said to her, "Marry me."

The maiden replied, "I have taken a vow that I shall only marry whoever defeats me in battle."

So Murdanav and the divine maiden fought. The maiden beheaded Murdanav with a sword and was victorious. God was pleased with the maiden and told her to ask for a boon. The maiden, Ekadashi, requested, "No one should take food on the day of my *vrat*. Since I have emerged from your light, I am an ascetic. So, on the day of my *vrat* all shall abstain from the mundane pleasures of their ten *indriyas* and the mind."

Shriji Maharaj stresses in the Vachanamrut that "on the day of Ekadashi, one should not merely fast, but one should also forsake the 'food' of the eleven *indriyas*." In fact, devotees should restrict their *indriyas* and observe this vrat daily but should not let loose their *indriyas*. They should pass the whole day in religious discourses, singing and

hearing bhajans extolling the Lord. They should stay awake till midnight engaged in such devotion. Further, Shriji Maharaj adds that one should attach to the manifest Brahmaswarup Satpurush by "withdrawing the ten *indriyas* and the mind – the eleventh *indriya* – from whichever *vishays* they have become attached to and then offering them into the *brahma-agni.*" That is, the ten *indriyas* and the eleventh mind should be withdrawn from their respective sensual objects and should be attached to Brahman. In this way Parabrahman will manifest fully in our *brahmarup* form (Vachanamrut, Gadhada II 8). In the Shikshapatri, Shriji Maharaj tells us to perform the completion ceremony of the Ekadashi *vrat*. Completing the Ekadashi vrat properly yields desired the fruits of the fast. In the completion ceremony, one should offer *mahapuja*, give a meal to sadhus on the day after the fast and donate to the mandir or the needy.

Ekadashi comes twice in a month, on the eleventh day of both the bright and dark half of each month. Everybody should fast on these days without taking any food or water. Those who are weak may take fruits. However, Shastriji Maharaj has instructed that all devotees should observe waterless fasts on Chaitra *sud* 9 (Hari Jayanti/Ram Navmi), Shravan *vad* 8 (Janmashtmi), Ashadh *sud* 11 (Devpodhi Ekadashi), Bhadarva *sud* 11 (Jal-Jhilani Ekadashi) and Kartik *sud* 11 (Devuthi/Prabodini Ekadashi). According to the scriptures one must observe all *vrats* till the age of 80. Every Ekadashi has a special story behind it and therefore each is known by a different names.

Prabodhini Ekadashi (Kartik sud 11)

From the eleventh day of the bright half of Ashadh Lord Vishnu retires for sleep on his throne in the ocean of milk. Four months later, at the end of the rainy season, he awakes on this day. It is said that Lord Vishnu had defeated the demon Shankhasur in the month of Ashadh. Exhausted from the fight, he went to the ocean of milk to take rest. Since Lord Vishnu awakes from sleep on this Ekadashi day the devotees rejoice and celebrate this day.

The marriage ceremony of the *tulsi* (basil) plant with Lord Vishnu is performed on this day. It marks the completion of *chaturmas* – the four months of the monsoon. All religious observances started in *chaturmas* may be relaxed from this day.

This day is very important in the Swaminarayan Sampradaya. In Samvat 1857 (28 October 1800), Shriji Maharaj was initiated into the sadhu-fold in the town of Piplana by Ramanand Swami and given the new names of Sahajanand Swami and Narayan Muni. An *annakut* is offered to God on this day at Piplana.

Also, on this day in Samvat 1858 (16 November 1801) in the town of Jetpur, Ramanand Swami appointed Maharaj as the Head of this Sampradaya.

Dharmadev, the father of Shriji Maharaj, was born on this day in Samvat 1796 (11 November 1739) in the town of Ittar.

To celebrate this day the *murtis* may be adorned with a crown and crimson coloured garments. A sweet called *ghebar* is offered to God at lunch. Special prayers and worship are offered to Dharmadev. All devotees and sadhus observe a waterless fast.

The *devas* also rejoice as God wakes up. So this day is also known as Dev Diwali. In celebration, a variety of vegetables are offered to the deities.

Kartiki Punam (Kartik sud 15)

Bhaktimata was born on this day in Samvat 1798 (22 November 1741) in the village of Chhapaiya. Therefore, puja is offered to Bhakti Devi when the moon rises. This day also marks the birthday of Tulsi and the conclusion of the marriage ceremony of Tulsi with Shri Vishnu. Starting from this day the deities are offered woollen clothes. Cooked eggplants are offered to the deities with other dishes. A big celebration is held at the BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir in Bochasan in the presence Pramukh Swami Maharaj.

Sometimes at night, a row of lighted lamps is arranged all around the mandir. Lamps of ghee are also placed before the *murtis*. This is due to the story that the demon Tripurasur, on getting a boon from Brahmaji began harassing the *devas*. Shivaji killed Tripurasur on this day. So, overcome with joy, all the *devas* arranged lighted lamps.

It is considered very auspicious to bathe in sacred rivers on this day as the River Ganga appeared on earth on this day. The sacred River Ganga is worshipped by the placing of lighted lamps in its waters. Also, the moon is under the sun on this day, so the hot sun-rays fall upon the moon. Therefore, it is customary to perform rites honouring one's ancestors (*shraddh*). Every *punam* the *murtis* are adorned with a beautiful crown.

Pramukh Swami Maharaj Janmajayanti (Magshar sud 8)

Shri Krishna says in the Gita, *"Māsānām Mārgarshirsho'ham"* – "Of the months, I am Magshar." Pragat Brahmaswarup Pramukh Swami Maharaj was born on this day in Samvat 1978 (7 December 1921) in the village of Chansad in Vadodara district. As commanded by Yogiji Maharaj, a grand celebration is held on this day by devotees all around the world.

Dhanurmas

The sun enters the ninth sign of the zodiac – Sagittarius (*Dhan*) – during the month of Maghshar. Hence, the one month period from this day is known as Dhanurmas. Throughout the year, the sun passes over the twelve different zodiacal signs in turn. Hence, the transition is known by the name of that particular zodiac sign. Starting from this day for one month after *mangala arti dhun* is sung before the deities. It is also a custom to put a fire pan before the *murtis*. Just after *shangar arti*, sweet and savoury delicacies are offered to the deities.

In this month, Shri Krishna went to study the science of archery in the ashram of Sandipani Rishi. To signify this study books and other educational materials are placed before the *murtis* during this month.

Makar Sankranti (14 January)

In the month of Posh, the sun enters the zodiac sign of Capricorn (Makar). This transition, known as the Makar Sankranti takes place on 14 January. It is auspicious to take a bath either in a river or lake early in the morning. On this day, the deities are customarily offered sesasme seed ladoos. Great importance is attached to giving alms

on this day. Sadhus also visit homes to accept alms (and donations) on this day.

Posh sud Purnima

Gunatitanand Swami was given the *bhagwati diksha* on this day in Samvat year 1866 (20 January 1810) on the final day of the grand *yagna* in Dabhan. A festival is celebrated at Dabhan every year to mark this occasion.

Vasant Panchmi (Maha sud 5)

God has said, "Rutunām Kusumākaraha." – "Of all the seasons, Vasantis my divine manifestation."

This is a very important day for the Swaminarayan Sampradaya. Shriji Maharaj revealed the Shikshapatrion this day in Samvatyear 1882 (12 February 1826). Sadguru Brahmanand Swami was born on this day in Samvat 1828 (8 February 1772) in the village of Khan, Rajasthan. Sadguru Nishkulanand Swami was born in Samvat year 1822 (15 January 1766) in Shekhpat near Jamnagar. Swami Yagnapurushdasji (Shastriji Maharaj), who established and spread the Akshar-Purushottam philosophy as revealed by Bhagwan Swaminarayan, was also born on this auspicious day in the village of Mahelav in the Samvat year 1921 (31 January 1865).

The shastras also describe that on this day Shri Krishna sprayed all his friends and queens with *abil* and *gulal* on Mt. Girnar, so much so that the whole of Mt. Girnar had become red.

Gulal is sprinkled over the clothes adorning the deities. As a symbol of Girnar, a heap of wheat or rice is arranged before God. Flowers of mango trees are also offered and sweets such as *jalebi* are offered. After the full moon day of Fagun the deities are offered saffron coloured clothes. The devotees sprinkle colours among themselves before God and remember the divine episodes of Shriji Maharaj. Married women sprinkle colours on each other. Dates, dry dates, coconuts, sugar cane, baked grams, *pendas*, grapes, etc. are offered to God.

Mahashivaratri (Maha vad 13)

There is a story in the Purans that Shivaji was pleased with a hunter on this night. Lord Shiva is worshipped at midnight with *bilipatra* and oleander (*karen*) flowers. The *murtis* are dressed in colourful garments and are offered *khir* and *vada.* Devotees observe *falahar* on this day.

Pushpadolotsav (Fagun vad 1)

Shri Krishna played *ras* with the Yadavs on Mount Girnar. Rejoicing, the Yadavs decorated a swing with colourful and fragrant flowers and offered their worship by ceremoniously placing Shri Krishna and Arjun on the swing.

On this day Shri Krishna and Arjun were born of Dharma-Prajapati as Nar-Narayan. Therefore, this day is also known as Nar-Narayan Jayanti. On this joyous occasion, the *devas* rocked Shri Nar-Narayan on a swing in the ashram of Dharma. Thus, the Pushpa-dolotsavis celebrated due to these two reasons. This festival is also called Fuldol.

In the *thal*, God is offered *dudhpak* and *bor*. He is also served *fagva,* which consists of popcorn, dates, sugar *patasas* and grams.

Once, when Maharaj celebrated this festival in Sarangpur the women devotees of north Gujarat asked for a unique type of *fagva* in the form of blessings. With the memory of that divine *fagva* given by Shriji Maharaj, one should offer prayers for divine *fagva* from the manifest Satpurush (Bhaktachintamani, Chap. 64).

Holi is celebrated on Fagan *sud* 15, the day before Pushpadolotsav. Hiranyakashyipu, the demon king, attempted to kill his son, the devout Prahlad, by fire. Hiranyakashyipu instructed his sister, Holika, to sit with Prahlad in her lap as a fire was lighted around them. Holika, though she had the power of being invincible to fire, was burnt to ashes and Prahlad was saved by God.

Brahmaswarup Pragji Bhakta (Bhagatji Maharaj) was born on the full moon day of Fagun in Samvat 1885 (20 March 1829) in the village of Mahuva in the Saurashtra region of Gujarat.

Traditionally, this festival is celebrated on a grand scale at the BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir in Sarangpur. On this occasion, homage is offered to Bhagatji Maharaj. Pragat Guru Hari blesses everyone and gives divine *fagva*.

Shri Hari Jayanti (Chaitra sud 9)

Purna Purushottam Bhagwan Swaminarayan (Sahajanand Swami) was born to Dharmadev and Bhaktimata on this day in Samvat 1837 (2 April 1781) at 10.10 p.m. in the village of Chhapaiya in the state of Uttar Pradesh, North India.

This is the most important festival of the Swaminarayan Sampradaya. Ghanshyam Maharaj is rocked in the cradle at night. The cradle is kept till Chaitra *sud* 14. The deities are offered saffron *biranj* (a sweet dish made from rice and sugar duly dressed with saffron).

The birthday of Shri Ramchandra in Ayodhya is also celebrated on this day.

All sadhus and householders observe a waterless fast and meditate upon Maharaj's divine episodes to celebrate this day.

Nrusinh Jayanti (Vaishakh sud 14)

God manifested at sunset on this day in the form of Nrusinh (half lion, half man; upper body of lion, lower body of man) to kill Hiranyakashyipu – the cruel father of the child-devotee, Prahlad. To mark this occasion, devotees fast by taking only *falahar*. God is offered dates, *vada*, etc.

Yogi Jayanti (Vaishak vad 12)

Brahmaswarup Yogiji Maharaj, Swami Jnanjivandasji, was born on this day in Samvat 1948 (23 May 1892) in the village of Dhari, near Amreli in Gujarat. Devotees gather in large numbers at their local mandir to remember the divine personality and teachings of Yogiji Maharaj.

Rath Yatra (Ashad sud 2)

Every year millions of people pull the chariots carrying the wooden *murtis* of Shri Krishna, Balaram and Subhadra at Jagannathpuri. This festival is also celebrated in all Vaishnav and Swaminarayan mandirs. Wooden horses and chariots are placed before the deities and a *chal murti* of the deity is placed in the chariot. The *murti* of the deity is adorned with a golden bow and arrow along with yellow and red garments. Kirtans are sung after the *rajbhog arti*. For the afternoon meal, the *murtis* are offered yogurt, rice, sugar crystals and *ladoos*.

Devshayani Ekadashi (Ashad sud 11)

This is also known as Devpodhi Ekadashi. Observance of special vows for *chaturmas* begins from this day. The Purans narrate that Shri Vishnu, after having defeated Shankhasur, went to sleep for four months in the ocean of milk. People undertake the observance of various *vrats* during these four months, as Vishnu is asleep. In the Shikshapatri, Shriji Maharaj has instructed his devotees to undertake additional religious observances during these four months.

The special vows Maharaj has prescribed include: Reading and listening to religious discourses, singing bhajans, performing *mahapuja* together with bathing the *murti* of God with *panchamrut*, chanting the *mantra* of God, reciting the *stotras* of Maharaj's names and characteristics, performing extra *pradakshina,* and performing extra *sashtang dandvats*. One should commit to performing at least one of these eight special observances with devotion.

Many devotees also observe austerities during these four months. Those who are physically weak to undertake these additional austerities for four months should observe them at least during the month of Shravan. These austerities include: eating only once a day, *dharna-parna*, *chandrayan*, etc. *Dharna-parna* involves observing a waterless fast on alternate days. In one form of *chandrayan,* the amount of food one consumes is regulated by the phases of the moon. On the first day of the month one morsel of food is taken, gradually increasing to fifteen morsels on the fifteenth day. In the next half of the month morsels are taken in decreasing quantity. Certain food items are prohibited during *chaturmas*. These are sugarcane, aubergines, radish, and *mogri*. These items are only taken after offering them to the *murtis* on the day of *annakut*.

Ashadhi Purnima (Ashad sud 15)

This day is known as Guru Purnima. As it is the birthday of Vyasji – the author of the Vedas, Mahabharat, Purans, etc. – the day is also called Vyas Purnima. The inner eyes of the people, which have been covered by ignorance, are opened by the guru, who instills one with spiritual knowledge. The guru makes us *brahmarup* and joins us to Parabrahman. Hence, this day is dedicated to the worship of the true guru, who represents the form of God on earth. True guru *pujan* is to know the guru as entirely free from all faults and to unite with him by mind, action and speech.

This festival is traditionally celebrated with great pomp at the BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir in Bochasan in the presence of our guru, Pramukh Swami Maharaj.

Hindola Utsav

The Shastras reveal, "*Sevāyām laukiki yuktihi snehastatra niyāmakaha*" – include public customs and rituals during the service and puja of God. There are no rituals assigned for the Hindola Utsav. Instead, it is a festival that allows devotees to express their love for God by including him in their personal activities. In the months of Ashadh and Shravan, people in India tend to swing on a cot during leisure time due to the temperate weather. Thus, as an expression of love, the deity is also rocked in a swing during these months. From Ashadh *vad* 2 to Shravan *vad* 2, the deities are swung in a variety of beautifully decorated swings. *Arti* is also performed when God is placed in the swing and special bhajans relating to the *hindolo* are sung.

Janmashtmi (Shravan vad 8)

Bhagwan Shri Krishna, with the purpose of destroying demons like Kans, Shishupal, etc., was born in a jail in Mathura on this day.

Sadguru Ramanand Swami, the guru of Shriji Maharaj was also born on this day in Samvat 1795 (26 August 1739). This festival is traditionally celebrated on a grand scale in the BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir in Atladra, Vadodara. Sadhus and householders observe a waterless fast on this day. The *murti* of the deity is given a *panchamrut* bath and at midnight, the time of Shri Krishna's birth, *arti* is performed. Five *thals* and *panchajiri* are offered. The *murti* of Shri Krishna is placed in a swing until Shravan *vad* 14, when it is removed after performing *arti*.

Ganesh Chaturthi (Bhadarva sud 4)

Ganesh, the son of Shivaji, was born on this day. Therefore, *pujan* is performed of Ganeshji's *murti* in the mandir. The deities are lavishly dressed and a dish of *churma* laddus is offered during *thal*. Looking at the moon on this night is prohibited.

Ganeshji is one of the five *devas* that Shriji Maharaj, has shown great reverence for in the Shikshapatri*;* the five deities are Shiva, Vishnu, Parvati, Surya (the Sun) and Ganapati

Jal-Jhilani Ekadashi (Bhadarva sud 11)

Resting during *chaturmas*, Vishnu changes his resting position on this day and so this day is also known as Parivartini Ekadashi – 'Ekadashi of Change'. Shri Krishna, after taking Radha and the other *gopis* for a boat ride in the river Yamuna, asked for yogurt from Radha and the other *gopis,* who were on their way from Gokul to Mathura to sell the yogurt. In celebration of this incident, a *chal murti* is taken for a boat ride in a river, lake or the sea. The deity is taken for a cruise in a boat. Five rounds are made, and the *arti* is performed after each round. After having been offered to God, cucumber is thrown into the water. Later, the *murti* is taken from house to house in a palanquin. All should observe a waterless fast on this day. This festival is traditionally celebrated at the BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir in Sarangpur.

Vaman Jayanti (Bhadarva sud 12)

King Bali had conquered all the three worlds (Swarg, Mrutyulok and Patal). There was no place for the *devas* to live. Hence, on this day, God manifested in the form of a dwarf, Vaman, and demanded three footsteps of space from King Bali. When Bali granted the boon, Vaman grew into an enormous form and in two steps recovered everything. Thus, having taken everything from Bali, God sent him to Patal (lowest of the nether regions).

Devotees eat only *falahar* till noon and have regular food only after the *rajbhog arti*. The deities are appropriately dressed with a yellow silk dhoti; and laddus are offered at lunch.

Sharad Purnima (Aso sud 15)

On this day in Samvat 1841 (17 October 1785), AksharbrahmanGunatitanand Swami was born in Bhadra, in the district of Jamnagar. This festival is traditionally celebrated at Akshar Mandir, Gondal. The *murtis* are bathed with *panchamrut* and offered *dudh-pauva* (flat rice soaked in milk and sugar). Under the full moon, five *artis* of the *murtis* in the mandir are performed.

This day is also known by the name of Manekthari Punam, the day on whicht Shri Krishna played *maha ras* with the *gopis* of Vraj. Devotees rejoice by singing the bhajans depicting the divine *ras lila*.

Hanuman Jayanti (Aso vad 14)

This day is the birthday of Hanuman. In the Shikshapatri Shriji Maharaj has instructed that puja be offered to Hanuman on this day. The deities are dressed in red clothes and offered *fulvadi*, *bhajiya*, *vada* and *maalpuva*. Hanumanji is worshipped with oil, vermilion, flowers of the *akda* plant, and *vada* made from *adad*. For three days, from Aso *vad* 13 until Aso *vad* 15, a series of lamps is also placed before the *murtis*.

Diwali (Aso vad 15, Amas)

This is the last day of the Vikram Samvat year. Lakshmi *pujan* is performed on this day. Businessmen perform *pujan* of their accounts books. Diwali is the principal festival of India. Indians all around the country and the world celebrate this festival with great fanfare. When God was asleep in the ocean of milk, Lakshmiji, in fear of the demons, hid herself in a lotus flower. So Lakshmiji is awakened by lighting a series of *divas*. The deities are offered *jalebi*, *khaja*, *sutarfeni*, *ghebar* and other delicious sweets. People rejoice at night with firecrackers.

Purushottam Mas

The month in which there is no transition of the sun (from one zodiac sign into another), is known as *adhik mas* (intercalary month). This additional month comes after an interval of 32 months, 16 days and 4 *ghadis*. There is a story in Purushottam Mahatmya which explains the importance of this month. The presiding deities of the 12 months are fixed. When the intercalary month was inserted for the first time, people thought it was useless. So, it sought the shelter of Purushottam Bhagwan. Out of

compassion the Lord agreed to be its presiding deity – and hence it is called Purushottam Mas. It is for this reason that people get extra benefit from the observance of *vrats* and donations in this month. Discourses are also arranged in mandirs. *Vrats* such as eating once a day, *dharna-parna*, etc. are observed in this month.

Patotsavs

The anniversary of the *murti-pratishtha* ceremony of a mandir is known as a *patotsav*. The *murtis* are bathed with *panchamrut*, adorned with a crown and rich garments, and offered *annakut*. The *patotsavs* of the Bochasanwasi Shri Akshar Purushottam Swaminarayan Sanstha's *shikharbaddh* mandirs are as follows:

Mandirs Consecrated by Shastriji Maharaj

1. Bochasan: Vaishakh *sud* 10, V.S. 1963; 5 June 1907
2. Sarangpur: Vaishakh *sud* 6, V.S. 1972; 8 May 1916
3. Gondal: Vaishakh *sud* 13, V.S. 1990; 24 May 1934
4. Atladra: Ashadh *sud* 3, V.S. 2001; 12 July 1945

Mandirs Consecrated by Yogiji Maharaj

5. Gadhada: Vaishakh *sud* 10, V.S. 2007; 16 May 1951
6. Ahmedabad: Vaishakh *sud* 7, V.S. 2018; 10 May 1962
7. Bhadra: Vaishakh *sud* 6, V.S. 2025; 3 May 1969

Mandirs Consecrated by Pramukh Swami Maharaj

8. Mumbai: Magshar *sud* 8, V.S. 2040; 12 December 1983
9. Mahesana: Magshar *sud* 8, V.S. 2051; 10 December 1994
10. London: Shravan *vad* 10, V.S. 2051; 20 August 1995
11. Surendranagar: Kartak *vad* 12, V.S. 2053; 7 December 1996
12. Surat: Magshar *sud* 7, V.S. 2053; 16 December 1996
13. Navsari: Magshar *sud* 7, V.S. 2054; 21 December 1997
14. Nadiad: Maha *vad* 10, V.S. 2054; 22 February 1998
15. Rajkot: Magshar *sud* 7, V.S. 2055; 26 November 1998
16. Mahelav: Maha *sud* 5, V.S. 2055; 22 January 1999
17. Nairobi: Shravan *vad* 3, V.S. 2055; 29 August 1999
18. Tithal: Magshar *sud* 8, V.S. 2056; 15 December 1999
19. Anand: Magshar *sud* 8, V.S. 2057; 3 December 2000
20. Sankari: Vaishakh *vad* 10, V.S. 2057; 18 May 2001
21. Dholka: Kartak *sud* 10, V.S. 2058; 25 November 2001
22. Bharuch: Kartak *vad* 9, V.S. 2058; 9 December 2001
23. New Delhi: Maha *sud* 5, V.S. 2059; 6 February 2003
24. Houston: Adhik Shravan *sud* 8, V.S. 2060; 25 July 2004
25. Chicago: Adhik Shravan *vad* 8, V.S. 2060; 8 August 2004
26. Jaipur: Aso *sud* 3, V.S. 2061; 5 October 2005
27. Junagadh: Vaishakh *sud 6*, V.S. 2062; 3May 2006

28. Bhavnagar: Vaishakh *vad* 7, V.S. 2062; 19 May 2006
29. Toronto: Ashadh *sud* 8, V.S. 2063; 22 July 2007
30. Atlanta: Shravan *sud* 8, V.S. 2063; 26 August 2007
31. Bhadra Vaishakh *sud* 6, VS 2066; 19 May 2010
32. Limbdi Vaishakh *vad* 1, VS 2066; 28 May 2010
33. Godhra Fagan *sud* 7, VS 2067; 12 March 2011
34. Bodeli Fagan *sud* 7, VS 2067 03 March 2011

17. Mataji

A young woman from Machhiav in the state of Gujarat, was married to a native of Udaipur in Rajasthan. Once, a Brahmin from Machhiav, named Mulji, went to Udaipur to see her. He had brought a *matli* for her and so was allowed to enter the palace. Here, he talked to the women at length about the greatness of Shriji Maharaj. Zamkuba, too, heard about the Brahmin's sermons.

Zamkuba was a native of the village Vagad and had imbibed the values and culture of her family. She was married to the King of Udaipur, but he was of a nature. He was a non-vegetarian and ate all foods prohibited by the shastras. He even insisted that his queen eat such things against her will. To bring an end to this harassment, Zamkuba decided to leave the comforts of the palace and run to the feet of God.

While one would not guess from her outwardly appearance, she was a courageous soul. One night she tied a rope of saris, descended secretly from her quarters and walked along the sewage track to exit the palace. She continued walking, but she did not know the way to Gadhada. By this time it was already daybreak. Fearing that the state soldiers would find her, she hid in the carcass of a camel lying in a trench.

In the morning the mounted soldiers began their search for the queen. Zamkuba was hiding in the carcass and saw them passing by. Zamkuba stayed hidden in the carcass for three days despite the stench, heat, and insects. On the third day, she saw the soldiers returning to the palace. Only then did Zamkuba come out of the carcass. As she walked on, she met a caravan of merchants and went with them to Vadnagar in Gujarat. Here, on the banks of a small lake, she met a group of women devotees of Bhagwan Swaminarayan. Excited to find them, she joined their group and accompanied them to Gadhada.

The mere darshan of Bhagwan Swaminarayan gave Zamkuba great inner peace. She saw everything the Brahmin had described about Shriji Maharaj and experienced divine bliss.

Bowing down at the feet of Shriji Maharaj, she earnestly said, "Maharaj! I do not wish to live a householder's life. I want to devote myself at your feet."

Omniscient Maharaj knew Zamkuba's background. He was extremely pleased with her faith and devotion. Shriji Maharaj accepted her as his disciple and told her to stay and serve with Jivuba in the *darbar*.

Though Zamkuba was a Kshatriya she was very humble and had a strong desire for salvation. Jivuba did not know her past. Consequently, she assigned her the work of collecting cow dung and cleaning the cow pens. She gave her simple *rotlas* for meals. Zamkuba was delighted to be able to serve Maharaj and the devotees. She enthusiastically did simple tasks like sweeping the *darbar* and fetching water for Maharaj and the sadhus.

Once, while Zamkuba was cleaning, Shriji Maharaj happened to pass by. Shriji Maharaj called Jivuba and asked her, "Do you know who this Zamkuba is?"

"No, Maharaj," replied Jivuba.

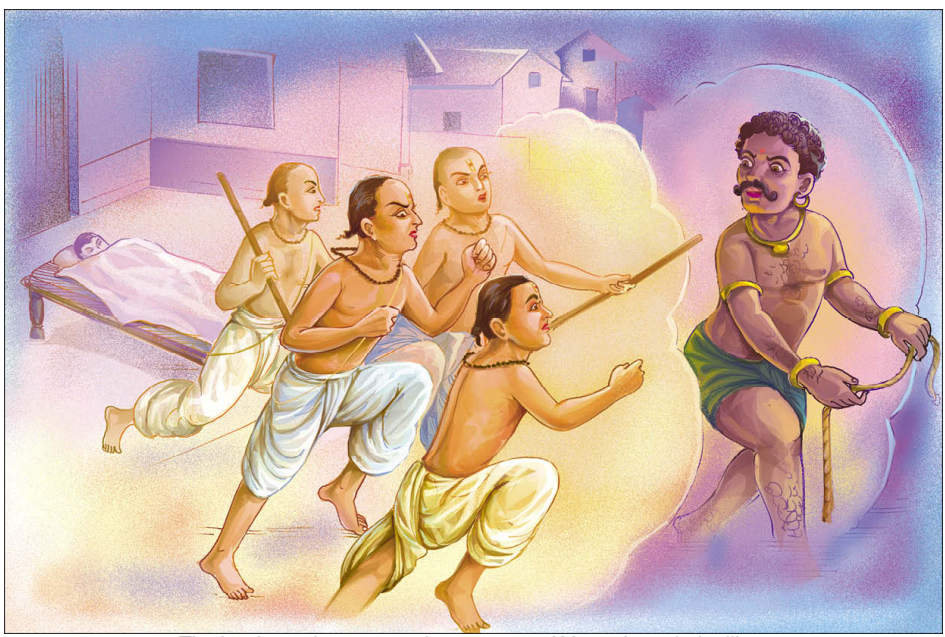
"She had many servants like you in her palace. She has left her kingdom to offer

devotion to God. She is the Queen of Udaipur. Don't assign such work to her." Shriji Maharaj gently scolded Jivuba.

As directed by Maharaj, Zamkuba shaved her head, wore only white clothes, and devoted her life to worshipping God. Shriji Maharaj renamed her Mataji and blessed her with a boon: "I will take you to my divine abode at the time of your death." Maharaj then sent Mataji to Bhuj with Ladhibai.

In Bhuj, Ladhibai and Mataji lived in the same room and meditated on Maharaj. Shriji Maharaj gave them his darshan every day. Both Mataji and Ladhibai left their bodies at the same time and were cremated on the same funeral pyre. Maharaj took both the released souls to his divine abode together.[1]

18. Rana Rajgar



The brothers chase away the servants of Yama from their village

Golida is a village in the Kathiawad region of Gujarat. Four Brahmin brothers, named Bhima, Vashram, Raghav and Rana lived there. They belonged to Rajgar Brahmin community and came from a virtuous family. Their father had completed a pilgrimage from Jagannathpuri to Dwarika by prostrating all the way.

Their father had also met Ramanand Swami, who had once visited Golida. On that occasion, Swami had explained to him, "Ultimate redemption cannot be attained without the contact of God in human form."

The old Brahmin had questioned, "Where can one find manifest God in this Kali-yug?"

At that time, before leaving for another village, Ramanand Swami had blessed him and said, "Your sons will be fortunate enough to come in contact with God in human

form."

Years later, Shriji Maharaj went from Sardhar to Golida. At the very first darshanof Maharaj, these four brothers overflowed with love for Shriji Maharaj as if they had always known him. They invited Maharaj to their house and lovingly served him a meal. They accepted initiation into the Satsang and became staunch disciples.

Greatly pleased with them, Shriji Maharaj offered, "Ask for a boon."

"Yama should never enter our village or its outskirts to fetch any soul," the brothers politely asked.

Slowly and steadily their whole village was drawn into Satsang. But there was one man who was very malicious towards Satsang. At the time of his death, the servants of Yama came to take him to hell. But on reaching the outskirts of the village, they began to experience burning sensations. Some of the *yamduts* warned, "The divine influence of Bhagwan Swaminarayan prevails in this village; we will not be able to enter the village." But others said, "There is nothing wrong in taking away an evil man."

All the four brothers took turns to guard the town. Today it was Bhima's and Rana's turn. They saw the servants of Yama and told them to go back. But the *yamduts* did not heed their warning. So the two brothers chased them out with sticks. The servants of Yama ran away. Such was the strength of the brothers' faith and confidence in Bhagwan Swaminarayan.

Raghav and Vashram wanted to become sadhus, but their mother refused. Rana then explained to his mother, "Please permit my brothers to become sadhus. Do not worry, I will serve you." His mother finally consented and both the brothers were initiated as sadhus. They were renamed as Raghavanand and Vishvatmanand. Both were known as *Jam-tagda* sadhus as they had driven away the servants of Yama.

Some time later, Rana fell ill and was on his deathbed.

His mother asked, "Who will look after me now?"

"I will come to take you to Dhamtwelve days from now," Rana promised his mother.

Shriji Maharaj came with a *viman* to take Rana to his abode. Rana asked everybody, "Those who want to come to Dham with me get ready." His son got ready and went to Akshardham with him. On the twelfth day Rana came with Maharaj to take his mother to Akshardham. Many saw this divine vision and were amazed.

Such was Rana Rajgar's faith and courage. Shriji Maharaj has even praised Rana Rajgar in Vachanamrut, Loya 3. We, too, should keep such faith and enthusiasm as we too have attained the manifest form of God and the Satpurush.

19. Vachanamrut

The Vachanamrut is truly nectar in the form of words. On drinking its words one is immortalized, transcends the cycle of births and deaths and becomes eligible to stay in Akshardham.

Just as the Bhagvad Gita is the word of Shri Krishna, the Vachanamrut is a compilation of the divine discourses of Purna Purushottam Bhagwan Swaminarayan. There is no scripture superior to it. It is the quintessence of all Hindu shastras, including the Vedas, Mahabharat, Ramayan, and the Purans.

Shriji Maharaj himself says in the Vachanamrut, Gadhada II 13, "This discourse is based on what I have seen and realized through my own experience. In fact, it is also in agreement with the scriptures."

Shriji Maharaj moved incessantly throughout the Sampradaya for 30 years. The sadhus noted down his discourses which were spoken directly, or presented in the form of questions and answers in the assemblies held in different places. Four leading scholarly *paramhansas* – Gopalanand Swami, Nityanand Swami, Muktanand Swami and Shukanand Swami – compiled the text with the inspiration of Shriji Maharaj.

Vachanamrut, Gadhada I 6:
One with Wisdom and One Without Wisdom

On Magshar *sudi* 9, Samvat 1876 [26 November 1819], Shriji Maharaj was sitting in Dada Khachar's *darbar* in Gadhada. He was dressed entirely in white clothes. At that time, an assembly of *munis* as well as devotees from various places had gathered before him.

Thereupon Shriji Mahārāj said, "In this Satsang fellowship, a person who is wise increasingly finds flaws within himself and perceives virtues in God and his devotees. Moreover, when God and his *Sant* utter harsh words of advice for his own benefit, he accepts them as beneficial and is not hurt by them. Such a person steadily attains greatness in Satsang.

"Conversely, as a person who lacks wisdom practises *satsang* and listens to discourses in Satsang, he continually perceives virtues within himself. Moreover, when God and his *Sant* highlight his flaws and advise him, he misinterprets such advice due to his arrogance. On the contrary, he perceives flaws in God and his *Sant*. Such a person steadily declines and loses his reputation in Satsang. Therefore, if a person renounces the vanity of his own virtues, becomes brave, and keeps faithin God and his *Sant*, then his ignorance is eradicated and he attains greatness in Satsang."

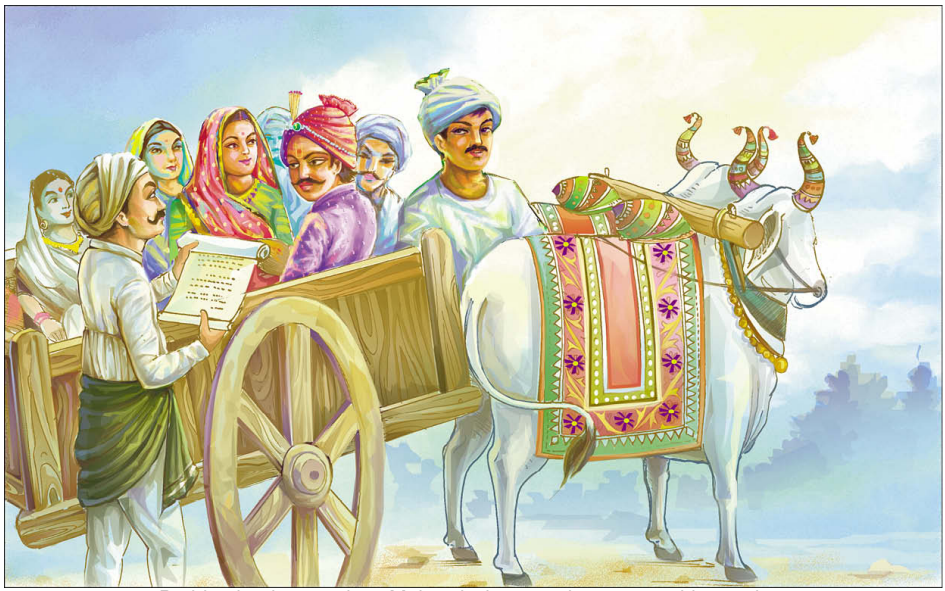
Explanation

Generally, people feel that a man who knows how to talk, eat and walk humanely, is a man who has a sense of civility and understanding; and the man who does not possess such ability is a man who has no sense of discernment. But spiritually, the faculty of discernment is different and is explained by Shriji Maharaj in this Vachanamrut. He explains that man has many faults but he does not look at them and instead will highlight even trifle faults in others. Supporting this, Surdas said, *"Mo sam kaun kutil khal kāmi."* Meaning, "There is no one as bad, deceitful and lustful as me." In this way, he always used to see his own faults.

To eradicate our faults, God or his holy Sadhu may reprimand or scold us. In those instances, do not take their *avgun* and understand their words to be for our benefit.

Thus if one rids oneself of all ego and keeps full faith in the words of the Sadhu, one eradicates one's own ignorance and progresses in *satsang*.

20. Prabhashankar and Devram



Prabhashankar receives Maharaj's letter and postpones his marriage

The altar was set for a wedding ceremony. The marriage procession of the bridegroom had started. The beating of drums and cymbals was in full swing. The party of relatives accompanying the bridegroom to the marriage was ready to start off in the bullock-carts.

Exactly at this moment a courier arrived with a letter for the elegantly dressed groom. Prabhashankar, the groom, read the letter and immediately took a decision. He called his relatives and said, "This marriage will have to be stopped. This is a letter from Shriji Maharaj calling me to Vartal."

The relatives were stunned at Prabhashankar's sudden decision. His parents tried to persuade him, but he did not change his mind. To him everything else was trivial before the command of Shriji Maharaj.

"The marriage can be arranged again, but the command of Shriji Maharaj will not come again," he said and left for Vartal. On arriving in Vartal he prostrated to Shriji Maharaj. Omniscient Maharaj asked him, "Well, Prabhashankar, what were you doing when you received my letter?"

Prabhashankar frankly narrated the full story. Shriji Maharaj was pleased and commented, "You are a true devotee."

Prabhashankar belonged to the town of Piplav. From childhood he remained absorbed in devotion to God, observed the moral codes firmly and was addicted to religious discourses.

This same series of events transpired again when Shriji Maharaj performed a great *yagna* at Dabhan in 1810 CE (Samvat 1866). Prabhanshankar's marriage was about to be celebrated when he received an invitation letter from Maharaj to attend the auspicious *yagna*. Again he put aside his wedding and prepared to go to Dabhan. His parents tried to prevent him. But he said, "Father, the marriage can be arranged next year, but Shriji Maharaj is not going to perform such a *yagna* again at Dabhan."

Devrambhai of Bhuj (in Kutch) was another devotee with such high understanding. When his wife passed away all his relatives lamented the death, but Devrambhai was not a man to mourn. To him everything except Shriji Maharaj was perishable. He had unflinching love and devotion only for Shriji Maharaj. According to social customs, his relatives asked him to take a purification bath because of the death of his wife. Devrambhai consented but said, "If there is news of the death of any other relative please tell me, so that I may take bath for him together with this bath." Such was the depth of his understanding.

21. Sachchidanand Swami

Maharaj feels Sachchidanand Swami's thirst and sends water for him

Everybody used to address him as Motabhai, but his real name was Dajibhai. He was seven feet tall and had a strong body. He was from the Vaghela Kshatriya community. This devotee from the town of Moda (near Jamnagar) was always engrossed in devotion to God, just like Jadbharat. His family did not like his intense spirituality.

From the first time he met Shriji Maharaj, Motabhai was completely attracted by Maharaj's *murti* and harboured an intense desire to become a sadhu. Thus, he frequently ran away from home to Shriji Maharaj. Annoyed by this, his family put

fetters on his legs and locked him in a room. Motabhai remembered Shriji Maharaj. Maharaj soon appeared before him, broke the fetters and took Motabhai to Gadhada.

In Gadhada, Motabhai was initiated into the sadhu-fold and renamed Sachchidanand Swami. Sachidananand Swami had great love for Shriji Maharaj. His mind was constantly attached to Maharaj's *murti*. Whenever he was separated from Maharaj, blood would ooze from every pore of his body. Many times he even fainted.

As instructed by Maharaj, Swami had the Radha Vav dug. Near this well, he cultivated a beautiful garden of flowers. Daily, Swami would offer decoratively interwoven garlands and flower bracelets to Shriji Maharaj.

Just as he had a deep affection for Maharaj, Swami also had a great affinity for Satsang. He often said, "Even if my legs are cut off, I will drag myself to where all sadhus throw the remnants of their food, sit there, eat those remnants and remain in Satsang. But I will never leave Satsang."

nce, Shriji Maharaj was giving special vows to be observed during *chaturmas*. Sachchidanand Swami took a vow, "I will not to sleep for four months and will sit cross-legged, with a stone on each thigh, to meditate on Shriji Maharaj during the night.

In a time of drought the devotees prayed to Shriji Maharaj for rain but Maharaj refused to oblige and said, "It won't rain this year as Indra has become angry."

The devotees became worried. They came to Sachchidanand Swami and shared their worries. Swami said, "I cannot do anything without the consent of Shriji Maharaj, otherwise he will become displeased."

But the devotees persistently requested, "If Maharaj scolds you, we will bear the brunt of the consequences, but please have pity on us."

Tenderhearted and compassionate, Swamiji sat in samadhi. In the state of samadhi, he gave a kick to Indra, woke him up and asked him to shower rain. Soon there was plentiful rainfall.

When Shriji Maharaj came to know that Sachchidanand Swami had brought the rains, he immediately excommunicated him from Satsang. Swami sat on the opposite bank of the River Ghela and began to offer devotion. Two days passed without food and water. He was very thirsty, but he did not give up chanting Maharaj's name.

Shriji Maharaj was sitting in his room, Akshar Ordi, and began to feel very thirsty. The attendant Brahmachari served him plenty of water, but his thirst was not quenched. Then Maharaj said, "Serve water to the Swami who is very thirsty." Ratanji and Miyaji understood the significance of these words. They ran with sanctified water from Shriji Maharaj to the opposite bank of river Ghela and served water to Sachchidanand Swami. It was only when Swami drank the water that Shriji Maharaj's thirst was quenched. Such was Sachchidanand Swami's oneness with Maharaj. Shriji Maharaj then called Sachchidanand Swami back into Satsang.

In the last moments before Shriji Maharaj returned to his divine abode, Sachchidanand Swami stopped his own pulse and breathing and went to Akshardham ahead of Shriji Maharaj.

On seeing him there, Maharaj immediately commanded, "Return to your body

again!"

"I won't be able to stay there. I will not be able to endure the separation from you," Swami urged repeatedly. Shriji Maharaj then gave him sanctified water to drink and promised to bring him to Akshardham within six months. Only then did Swami come back into the body. Unable to bear separation from Maharaj, Swami still refused to eat or drink anything. Soon after, Shriji Maharaj took Sachchidanand Swami to Akshardham.

Such was Sachchidananad Swami's deep love for Shriji Maharaj.

22. Subhashit: Sanskrit Maxims

1. *Ayam nijah paro vetti gananā laghuchetasām;*
udāracharitānām tu vasudhaiva kutumbakam.

'This is mine and this is someone else's' are the thoughts are of a narrow-minded person. However, for one who is broad-minded, considers that the whole world is his family.

2. *Gangā pāpam shashi tāpam dainyam kalpatarustathā;*
Pāpam tāpam cha dainyam cha ghnanti santo mahāshayāha.

The Ganga destroys sins, the coolness of the moon drives away the heat and the *kalpataru* tree abolishes poverty, but the Satpurush destroys sins, grief and poverty.

3. *Manasyekam vachasyekam karmanyekam mahātmanām;*
Manasyanyad vachasyanyad karmanyanyad durātmanām.

The great act in consonance with their thoughts and words, whereas the thoughts, words and deeds of the wicked are not in consonance.

4. *Prasangamajaram pāsham ātmanaha kavayo viduhu;*
Sa ev sādhushu kruto mokshadwāram apāvrutam.

If the same intense attachment the *jiva* has towards his body and relations is directed towards the holy Sadhu, the door to ultimate redemption for the *jiva* is opened.

5. *Na hyammayāni tirthāni na devā mruchchhilāmayāhā;*
Te punantyurukālena darshanādeva-sādhavahā.
(Shrimad Bhagvat 10-84-11)

Sacred places on land and water, *murtis* made of stone and earth, are not merely tokens of pilgrimage or worship, they have divine powers. However, they purify the users only after a long time. Whereas the mere darshanof a sadhu purifies instantly.

6. *Shraddhāvān labhate gnānam tatparaha sayatendriyaha;*
Gnānam labdhvā param shāntimachirenādhigachhati.

(Bhagvad Gita 4-39)

A person of faith, whose heart is devoted, whose senses are controlled, attains this knowledge. And after attaining this knowledge soon attains the highest peace.

7. *Sarva dharmān parityajya māmekam sharanam vraja;*
Aham tvām sarvapāpebhyo mokshayishyāmi mā shuchaha.
(Bhagvad Gita 18-66)

Shed all your ideas of dharma and the strength of dharma and seek my refuge. Fear no longer, for I will redeem you from all sins and grant you *moksha*.

8. *Kāryam na sahasā kinchit kāryo dharmastu satvaram;*
Pāthaniyadhitavidya kāryaha sangonvaham satām.
(Shikshapatri 36)

Duties relating to dharma should be performed instantaneously while duties relating to social affairs should be performed after due deliberation. The learned should impart their learning to others and should daily keep the company of sadhus.

9. *Dharmena rahitā Krishnabhaktihi kāryā na sarvathā;*
Agnanindābhayānnaiv tyajyam Shri Krishnasevanam.
(Shikshapatri 39)

None shall practise devotion to Shri Krishna disregarding the religious tenets, nor shall they give up the worship of Shri Krishna for fear of criticism by the ignorant.

10. *Api bhuri falam karmam dharmapetam bhavedyadi;*
Ācharyam tarhi tannaiv dharmaha sarvārtha-dosti hi.
(Shikshapatri 73)

My devotees shall desist from those acts which are contrary to the scriptural tenets, however much rewarding they may be. For dharma alone yields all desired objects.

23. Jalamsinh Bapu

Jalamsinh Bapu rushes back to Shriji Maharaj with the barber

"Swami! My body is at risk here," said Shriji Maharaj to Muktanand Swami. Shriji Maharaj had arrived at Tavi from Shiyani near Limbdi. On the outskirts of the village, Shriji Maharaj was having his head shaved by a barber who was a little rough at his job.

On hearing this, Jalamsinh Bapu, who was standing nearby, requested, "Maharaj, if you permit me, I can get a better barber from my village right away." Shriji Maharaj granted him permission and Bapu left speedily on a mare for Devalia.

Devalia is six miles from Tavi. Knowing it would take Bapu some time to cover that distance, Maharaj decided to walk towards Devalia with the other sadhus and devotees. Exactly halfway to Devalia, Maharaj arrived at Doli Talavdi and held an assembly under a pipal tree.

On reaching Devalia, Jalamsinh Bapu called for the barber. The barber sharpened his razor, put the bag under his armpit and was ready to go.

Bapu asked the barber to run along with him while he stayed on horseback. But how fast could the poor barber run with the bag under his armpit? Bapu wanted to reach Maharaj as soon as possible. Maharaj was waiting, half shaven, in Doli Talavdi. What could not be done for the beloved Lord? So Bapu put aside his pride and reputation and put the barber's bag under his armpit and told the barber, "Hold this stirrup and run along with me."

On reaching Doli Talavdi, he saw Maharaj seated in the asembly. Bapu alighted from the mare, came near Shriji Maharaj and stood with folded hands. At that time Purnanand Swami also arrived there and was standing at the back. He could not walk as fast as the group with Maharaj and so was late. As the assembly was packed, Purnanand Swami did not get a proper seat.

Seeing Purnanand Swami standing aloof, omniscient Maharaj, commented, “Has anybody seen ego personified?” All were surprised to hear this. Maharaj continued, “This Bapu, who is the ruler of the state and truly deserves respect, is standing there in a corner humbly holding the barber’s bag under his armpit. Whereas this sadhu, who should live humbly, expects to be honoured.” So saying, Shriji Maharaj pointed his finger towards Purnanand Swami. Feeling insulted, Swami immediately left the assembly and walked away.

Shriji Maharaj had his head shaved under the pipal tree and then took a bath. Then he went with the group to Devalia at the invitation of Jalamsinh Bapu.

As Maharaj entered the Darbar’s courtyard, Keshaba was spreading some wheat on the verandah.” Keshaba, what are you doing?” asked Maharaj.

“Small insects breed in the wheat, so I am spreading it in the sunlight.”

Expressing his pleasure, Shriji Maharaj blessed them, “No more insects will breed in your food grains.”

“But what do we really profit out of that?” asked Keshaba lovingly.

Maharaj replied, “I will take any soul leaving its body in your courtyard to Akshardham.”

Hearing such blessings from Shriji Maharaj, Keshaba and Jalamsinh Bapu were overwhelmed with joy and fell at his feet.

24. Sermons of Gunatitanand Swami

1. *Swaminarayan hare Swamie vat kari je: "Ek jane lākh rupiyāni buddhi lidhi. Temaj mokshani buddhi pan anek prakārni motā thaki shikhāy chhe"* (1.127).

"A person bought wisdom for 100,000 rupees. Similarly, wisdom of the many ways for *moksha* can be learnt from the God-realized Sadhu."

A prince and a minister's son were close friends. On their way to another village they stayed a night in a jungle. When they awoke the next morning both were very hungry. The prince told his friend to get some food from the nearby town. The minister's son went to the town but found the gates of the town were closed.

It had so happened that the town's king had died childless. To choose their next king, the townspeople had decided that the first person to enter the town in the morning would be the new king. When the gates were opened that morning, the minister's son was the first to enter and so he was proclaimed king.

Meanwhile, the prince grew tired of waiting for his friend to return with food. So he set out in search of his friend. Soon, the prince too reached the town. As he entered, he noticed a shop sign which read, "For sale – Intellect". Out of curiosity, the prince entered into the shop and asked the price for the intellect. The shop owner replied, "It ranges from one rupee to one *lakh* rupees." The prince then gave a jewelled ring valued at one *lakh* rupees and asked for wisdom.

"One should bow to one's junior in case he is raised to a position of power." The shop owner wrote this on a piece of paper and handed it over to the prince.

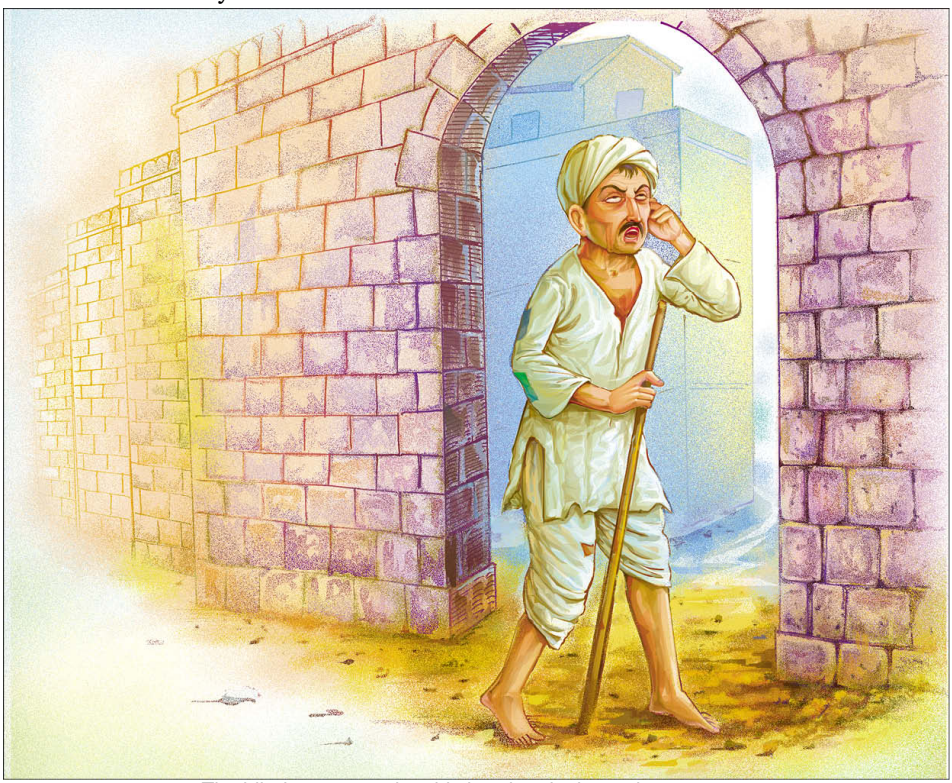
The prince read the note and left. When he had walked a short distance he noticed that the town king's procession was coming towards him and so he stood to one side. When the procession came near, the prince saw that the king sitting on the elephant was his friend, the minister's son. At first he felt angry at him; his friend had left him in the jungle and instead of bringing back food and was enjoying himself as the new king of the town. Just then the prince remembered the words on the note. Immediately, he bowed down and paid salutations to the new king.

The minister's son noted that his friend was bowing to him. On returning to the royal palace he summoned the court and asked the assembly, "Now that I am the king I can do as I please." So, he called for his friend, the prince, and handed over the royal throne to him.

This prince bought advice for a *lakh* rupees and by acting according to the advice he benefited by becoming the king of a new town. Similarly, we receive wisdom from the holy Sadhu and when we act according to that wisdom, we attain salvation. If we associate with the holy Sadhu and receive such wisdom, then just as the prince attained a new kingdom, we shall attain Akshardham.

2. *Swaminarayan hare Swamie vat kari je: "Karod rupiyā kharche pan āvā Sādhu male nahi ne karod rupiyā detā pan ā vatu male nahi ne karod rupiyā āptā pan manushyadeh male nahi. Ne āpne pan karod janma dharyā chhe pan koi vakhat āvo jog malyo nathi. Nikar shu karvā deh dharvu pale?"* (1.19).

“Even by spending tens of millions of rupees, such a Sadhu is unattainable. Even by giving tens of millions of rupees, such spiritual talks are unattainable. Even by giving tens of millions of rupees this human body cannot be attained. And we, too, have taken tens of millions of births. But never have we had such company of the God-realized Sadhu. Otherwise why would we have to take birth?”



The blind man scratches his head and misses the open gate

It is very difficult to attain the company and talks of a sadhu possessing the attributes of dharma, *jnan*, *vairagya* and bhakti. His enlightened talks have the power to dispel the ignorance of *maya* within us. It is also rare to attain a human birth; we take birth as a human only after moving through the whole cycle of 8,400,000 life forms. We have attained all three of these things. And what are we doing with these rare attainments? The following story illustrates.

A blind man committed a crime. But what punishment could be given to a blind man? The king commanded him, “Surrounding this town is a 24 mile-long fort with only one gate. Go walk with your hand on the fort’s wall and when the gate comes, you are free.”

The blind man started walking, with one hand touching the wall of the fort and a walking stick in the other. When he was a few steps from the gate came he felt an itch on his head. So, as he walked on, he lifted his hand to scratch his head. In the moments he used his hand to scratch his head, he walked passed the gate. When he placed his hand back on the wall, all he felt was the solid wall and so he ignorantly started the 24

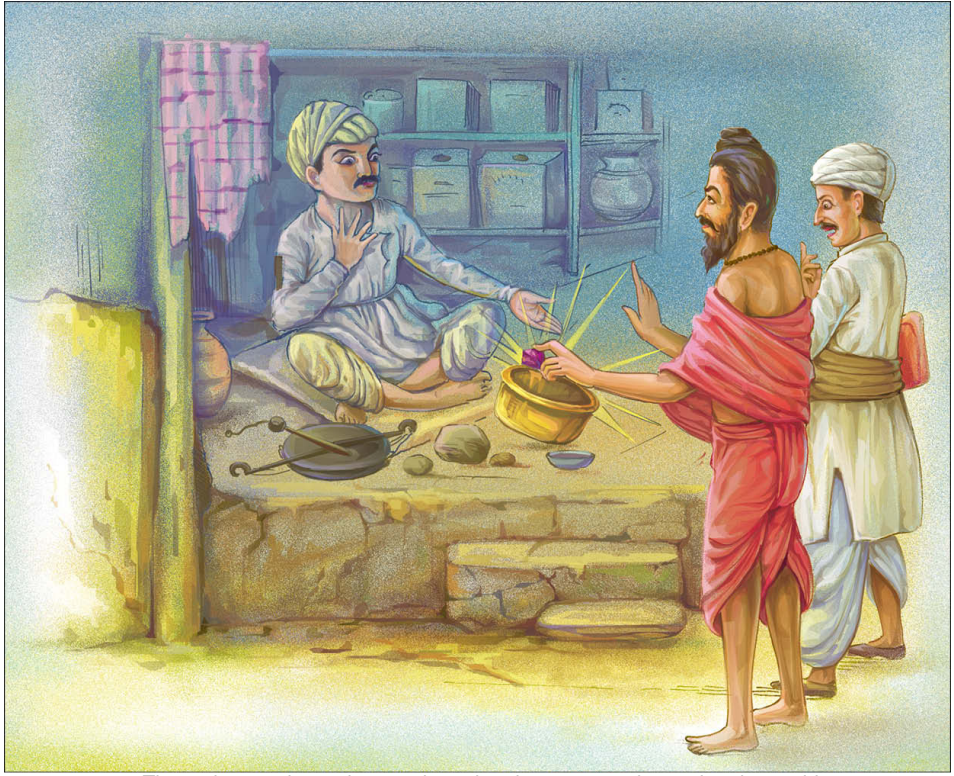
mile trek all over again. The same happens to us. We have attained this rare human body and have come in contact with a true Sadhu. Now, we must recognize his greatness and eradicate our ignorance by listening too his discourses.

3. *Swaminarayan hare Swamie vat kari je: "Satsang thāy pan sang vinā satsangnu such na āve, keni pethe to jem khādhānu male pan khādhā vinā tenu sukh na āve, temaj lugdā-gharenā male to pan peryā vinā tenu such na āve, tem sang vinā satsangnu such āve nahi"* (1.29).

"One can attain Satsang, but without close association, there is no happiness. How? It is like a person having food, but without actually eating there is no happiness. Also, one may have clothes but without wearing them there is no happiness. Similarly, without the association of the great Sadhu, one does not get the bliss of Satsang."

Simply standing on the banks of a river does not quench one's thirst; one must drink some of the fresh water. The snake, which wraps itself fully on the sandalwood tree but keeps its mouth away from the tree, retains its poison. Similarly, we are fortunate to have attained *satsang* – something that is a rare achievement even for Brahma, Shiva and other deities. However, if we will not experience bliss if we do not actively take benefit of this *satsang.*

Once there was a shopkeeper who sold edible oil for a living. He had a small shop in town and was constantly busy making small sales to his customers. One day an ascetic, on his way to perform austerities, came to this shop with a *parasmani*. The mahatma decided to give this precious stone to this simple merchant for safe keeping. The ascetic took out the *parasmani* and explained to the shopkeeper, "This is a *parasmani*. If you touch it to any iron, the iron will turn into gold. You will no longer be poor. Keep it with you; I'll come to retrieve it on my way back."



The mahatma shows the merchant that the parasmani turns iron into gold

The shopkeeper was completely engrossed in his business. Hurriedly he told the Mahatma, "Whatever you have, put it in the recess of the wall." The sadhu placed the *parasmani* there, and went away. The shopkeeper was so engrossed in his menial business transactions that he never found the time to even look in the recess of the wall.

The mahatma returned after six months. He imagined that the shopkeeper must have surely become rich and happy by now. But on entering the town he saw that the shopkeeper was running the shop in the same old state.

The mahatma went to the shopkeeper and asked for the *parasmani*.

"Swamiji! Please take it from wherever you left it."

The ascetic saw the *parasmani* in the recess in the wall. The stone was covered with dust. It was obvious that the shopkeeper did not understand the importance of the *parasmani*. Reprimanding the shopkeeper, the Mahatma told him, "In your one penny or two penny business, you have ignored this magical *parasmani*. You have not seen the wonder of this *parasmani*." So saying he asked for some pieces of iron.

However, the poor shopkeeper did not have any pieces of iron in his shop. So he went here and there and collected two pounds of iron. As soon as the mahatma touched the *parasmani* to the two pounds of iron, it turned into gold. The vania jumped with excitement. He asked the Mahatma to leave the *parasmani* for a while more.

"Fool, I left it here for six months. Now it is your fate." So saying the mahatma

walked away with his *parasmani*.

We have been blessed with a *parasmani* in the form of this Satsang, but idleness and negligence obstruct us. We can turn ourselves into precious gold if we practise *satsang* wholeheartedly by body, speech and actions.

4. *Swaminarayan hare Swamie vat kari je: "Jevo hu satsange karine vash thāu chhu evo tap, yagna, yoga, vrat, dānādik sādhane karine vash nathi thato. Te satsang te shu? Je motā ekāntikne hath jodvā ane te kahe tem karvu ej chhe"* (1.17).

"God has said, 'I am not as pleased by austerities, sacrifices, yoga, observance of vows, donations and other endeavours as I am by *satsang*.' What is that *satsang*? To fold one's hands before the great God-realized Sadhu and to do as he says."

This is a *shloka* from the 11th canto of the Shrimad Bhagvat. People believe in differing endeavours to attain *moksha*. Some perform severe austerities, some give donations, whereas some try to control their senses and mind through eight-fold yoga. But all these means bring redemption after a very long time. God is not pleased immediately by such means.

There lived two brothers in a village. The younger one was fond of the contact of sadhus, whereas the elder one liked to go on pilgrimages. The elder brother insisted that the younger one join him on the pilgrimages. But the younger brother politely refused. Once he said, "Dear elder brother, take this gourd with you in my place."

The elder brother took the gourd with him on the pilgrimage. At all the pilgrim places he touched the gourd at the feet of the *murtis*, dipped it in the waters of all holy rivers and so on. The elder brother returned home after the pilgrimage. The younger brother invited him to dinner. When the elder brother came, the younger brother took the gourd and filled it with water and asked his brother to take water from the *tumbdi*. As soon as the elder brother drank some water, he spat it out. "How bitter!" he exclaimed. He then had some sweet *dudhpak* but the bitterness would not go away. Only after some days did the bitterness go away.

After some time, the younger brother invited the elder brother to dinner again. Again he gave the elder brother water in the same gourd. But the elder brother said, "I will not drink water from this *tumbdi*." To assure him, the younger brother drank water from it first and then asked him to drink from it. The water was sweet. The elder brother asked the reason for this. The younger brother said, "A sadhu cleaned the gourd from the inside, which was bitter." Similarly, the bitterness which is within us in the form of lust, anger, greed and other enemies cannot be removed by mere pilgrimages. But by the contact of the enlightened sadhu they are immediately removed.

This illustration teaches us that the attachment towards a Satpurushis true satsang. When we approach such an *ekantik* sadhu we must discard ego, become humble and have faith that he will grant *moksha.* This is the real meaning of 'to fold one's hands'. After keeping such faith, one must implicitly obey his wishes.

A medical store may have plenty of medicines in stock, but if we use them without fully knowing their usage, they would adversely affect us. However, when the doctor

prescribes them the disease is cured. Similarly, if *jap*, *tap*, observance of religious vows, etc. are practiced as per the instructions of an *ekantik* sadhu, then one is relieved from the cycle of births and deaths. But self-willed effort does not lead to *moksha.*

5. *Swaminarayan hare Swamie vat kari je: "Prahlādjie Nārāyan sāthe ghanā divas yuddha karyu pan Bhagwan jitānā nahi. Pachhi Bhagwane Prahlādne kahyyu je, 'Yuddha karine to hu jitāu tevo nathi ne mane jitvāno upāy to e chhe je, jibhe karine māru bhajan karvu, manmā māru chintvan karvu ne netramā māri murti rākhvi – e prakāre nirantar māri smruti karvi,' em kahyu. Pachhi evi rite Prahlāde abhyās karyo tyare Bhagwan cha māsmā vash thai gayā. Māte Bhagwanne rāji karvāne arthe ā upāy sarvopari chhe te shikhvo"* (1.3).

"Prahladji fought for many days with Narayan, but God was not won over. Then God told Prahlad, 'I cannot be won over by such wars. The way to win me over is by singing my bhajans,thinking of me in your mind and cherishing my *murti* in your eyes. In this way, always remember me.' Then, Prahlad tried this method and God was won over within six months. Thus, to please God, learn this method, which is the best."

Different types of foes require different tools to defeat them. While one needs a sword, a shield, or a gun to defeat a warrior, these same tools are useless in defeating a scholar in a debate; to defeat a scholar, one must use one's sharp intellect. While weapons may work against warriors in battle, they do little in the battle against diseases caused by insects or viruses; these diseases can only be defeated with medicine. Similarly, worldly weapons cannot win over the supreme and all-powerful God; to win him over one needs to use a whole new type of weapon. In this sermon, Gunatitanand Swami describes this unique type of battle and shows us the tools one must use to win over God.

Ravan and Kans were highly intelligent and heroic men but did not know the way to win Rama and Krishna respectively and were ultimately defeated. On the other hand, Bali was a demon yet he pleased God because he ignored his weapons and resorted to the true way of winning against God. Gunatitanand Swami has shown this way to please God in this sermon. Swami says if we attach all our senses to God, He is won over immediately. This method is revealed to us by the *ekantik* sadhu. It is a difficult task but can be accomplished with constant practice.

Once, Gunatitanand Swami sent Ramdas Swami to Vanthali for some work. He instructed him, "Chant 'Swaminarayan, Swaminarayan' mentally all the way." Thus, totally engrossed in chanting the mantra, Ramdas Swami reached Vanthali. As a result, he saw the divine form of Shriji Maharaj on every indentation of the fort surrounding the village.

Thus, we should learn this ultimate method to please God.

25. Kirtan

Snehbharyā nayane nihāltā ho,
vandan ānand Ghanshyāmne;

Amimay drashtie nihāltā ho,
vandan ānand Ghanshyāmne…

Chhapaiyāpurmā vā'lo āpe pragat thayā,
Dharmabhaktine gher ānand utsav thayā,
Santone ānand upjāvtā ho,
Vandan ānand Ghanshyāmne…
Snehbharyā nayane…1

Bāl charitra kari āpe van vicharyā,
Tirthomāhi fari jivo pāvan karyā,
Nilkanth nām dharāvtā ho,
Vandan ānand Ghanshyāmne…
Snehbharyā nayane…2

Valkal vastra dhari Pulhāshrame rahyā,
Brahmarup tej dhari motā jogi thayā,
Nij swarup samjāvtā ho,
Vandan ānand Ghanshyāmne…
Snehbharyā nayane…3

Lojpur Dhām rahi Sarjudās kā'viyā,
Sarvopari gnān kahi santone rijhāviyā,
Muktānand prem thaki pujtā ho,
Vandan ānand Ghanshyāmne…
Snehbharyā nayane…4

Glossary

A

agna instruction, order, command

Akshar in his personal form, Akshar serves Purushottam in his abode, Akshardham, and manifests as his ideal devotee, the Satpurush, on earth

abil white powder used during worship rituals

adad a type of edible pulse

adhik mas intercalated month. The twelve lunar months of the Hindu year fall short of the solar year by about eleven days. In order to bring the year as nearly as possible into accordance with the solar year and the cycle of the seasons, one lunar month is added every two-and-a-half years. This extra month is called *adhik mas* or Purushottam Mas

agna tenet, commandment

ahimsa non injury, in mind, action and speech.

akda a type of plant

akshar mukta released soul, residing in Akshardham.

annakut offering of many food items before the *murti* of God.

antaryami 'Inner controller'. Power of God to reside within a *jiva, ishwar,* etc., and control its each and every action. Also implies God knowing its innermost thoughts and feelings.

apad emergency

artha one of the four human endeavours allowing for the fulfilment of desires of material objects; in particular wealth

arti Hindu ritual of waving lighted wicks before the *murti* of God as an act of worship

ashram building; also, stage of life, e.g. *brahmacharya* ashram, *gruhasth* ashram

atma soul

atmanand joy derived from being absorbed in the soul

atmarup one who has realized one's true self as *atma*

avgun faults

B

bhagwati diksha initiation into the sadhu-fold

bhajiya a fried savoury snack

bilipatra leaves of tree sacred to Lord Shiva

biranj a sweet delicacy made of rice

bor jujube tree

brahamacharya celibacy

brahmachari a celibate. One who practises *brahma-charya* and whose *indriyas* are engrossed in God

brahmanishtha God-realized

brahmarup form of Brahman. Possessing qualities similar to those of Brahman

brahmavidya knowledge of Brahman

C

chal mobile

chandlo auspicious vermilion mark applied on the forehead

chandrayan form of fasting where one's intake of food is regulated by the waxing and waning of the moon. For example, one form is to increase food intake from one morsel of food at the beginning of a new lunar month rising to 15 morsels on Punam, then decreasing again to a complete fast by Amas; or, beginning with 15 morsels of food at the beginning of a new month and decreasing to a complete fast on Punam, then increasing again to 15 by Amas. Other forms involve having only eight morsels a day, or four morsels twice a day, or merely three morsels a day

chaturmas the four holy months of the monsoon season

cheshta verses sung before bedtime about the daily routine and glory of Shriji Maharaj

D

dandvat prostration

darbar court of residence belonging to a king or feudal ruler, traditionally with a central courtyard surrounded by rooms with verandas

darbh type of sacred grass

deva deity

Dham short form for Akshardham, abode of Bhagwan Swaminarayan

dharna-parna vow of fasting on alternate days

dhun chanting of God's name

dokdo unit of currency

dudhpak rich item of food made of sweetened milk and rice, garnished with aromatic spices and nuts

dudh-pauva parched and flattened rice with milk

E

ekadashi special religious observance of fasting performed on the 11th day of the bright and dark halves of each lunar month

ekantik one possessing an elevated spiritual state wherein one offers bhakti to God along with dharma, *jnan* and *vairagya*, i.e., all four of the attributes of *ekantik dharma*

F

fagva special blessings and *prasad* received on the Fuldol festival

falahar foods that may be eaten on *ekadashi*

fulvadi type of snake charmer

G

gaushala cowshed

ghadi duration of time equaling approximately 24 minutes

ghebar a sweet delicacy

gopi women of the cowherd class who were devotees of Shri Krishna

gulal fragrant reddish powder used on joyous occasions

guna three attributes of *maya – rajoguna, tamoguna and sattvaguna*

gunatit one who is above the three *gunas* of *rajas, tamas* and *sattva*; above *maya*

gurubhai initiated by the same guru

H

himsa injury - by mind, action or speech

hindolo swing

I

indriya a sense by which one perceives

J

jalebi kind of sweet made from gram flour, sugar, ghee

Jam-tagda drive away Yama's servants

jap mantra recitation

jiva soul

jnan Knowledge

K

Kal time

kalpataru wish-fulfilling tree

kama lust. Desires for worldly sense pleasures.

kansar a sweet delicacy

kanthi double-threaded necklace, usually made of tulsi beads, received by *satsangis* upon initiation into the Satsang Fellowship, and worn as a sign of their affiliation to God

karen flower

khatra an observance in which only food devoid of the six types of taste – sweet, salty, bitter, sour, spicy – is eaten

khir a hot, thick sweet delicacy from milk, sugar, rice and dry fruits. It is similar to *dudhpak*

kumkum vermilion powder used for applying *chandlo*

kusangi a person who is bad company, i.e., a bad influence on one's spiritual progress, and leads one astray from Satsang

L

ladoo a sweet delicacy

lakh one hundred thousand

M

mafo an enclosed cart

mahamantra a great mantra

mahapuja special worship offered to Bhagwan Swaminarayan, Gunatitanand Swami, *muktas*, incarnations and deities

mala rosary

maalpuva a sweet delicacy made of wheat and fried in ghee

mangala first *arti* of the day, performed at sunrise

mansi puja mental worship. Form of worship in which one devoutly performs puja, offers *arti, thal,* etc., to God mentally

mantra sacred word or sound recited during worship or meditation

matli earthen pot full of sweet delicacies

maya one of the five eternal realities; ignorance, darkness, material universe

mogri a kind of vegetable

moksha release from the cycle of births and deaths and attaining Akshardham where one offers eternal devotion to Purushottam

mukta a liberated soul

muni sadhu

murti sacred image of God that is revered and worshipped

murti-pratishtha traditional Vedic ceremony in which *murtis*, or images, are ritually consecrated in a mandir

N

nirlobh non-covetousness

nirman vow of humility

nishkam vow of absolute celibacy

nissneh vow of detachment

nisswad vow of non-taste

niyam moral and spiritual disciplines

P

padhramani visit by sadhus to sanctify a home

panchajiri mixture of powdered ginger, coriander seeds, cumin, coconut, sugar or gur, ghee

panchamrut mixture of milk, curd, ghee, honey and sugar used in ritual worship of deities

paramhansa 'supreme swan'. A male sadhu of the highest order, characterised by his ability to discriminate between *sat* and *asat* – just as swans were traditionally considered to be able to distinguish between milk mixed with water

parasmani Philosopher's Stone. Magical gem that turns iron into gold

patasa sweet delicacy

patotsav anniversary celebration of mandir *murti-pratishtha* ceremony

pendas a sweet delicacy made from milk

pradakshina circumambulation

prahar a period of three hours

prakrut pralay partial dissolution of the universe

prasad sanctified food, blessed and consecrated by having been offered to God

pujan the act of worshipping

punam full moon, fifteenth day of lunar month

puri a fried delicacy made of wheat flour

purusharth 'Pursuits'. Collective term for the four goals legitimately pursued by all Hindus, namely: dharma (duties), *artha* (material wealth), *kama* (desires), and ultimately, *moksha* (liberation)

R

rajbhog lunch offered to God; third *arti* of the day, performed at 11.30 a.m.

rajogun quality of passion

ras traditional Indian folkdance normally played between a collection of partners, each partner having a pair of sticks to strike in accompaniment to the music while singing and dancing in a circular motion

rotlo a basic unleavened bread-like staple food of many parts of Gujarat, made generally of millet flour that is kneaded and patted into a flat, circular shape before being cooked on an earthen or metal hot plate

S

sadhana spiritual endeavour

samaiya festival

Samvat the Hindu year. It is sometimes called Vikram Samvat. The Hindu calendar is 56 years ahead of the Christian calendar

Sant synonymous in the Vachanamrut with Satpurush

sashtang dandvat prostration with eight parts of the body

Satpurush God-realized Sadhu

satsang the practice of spiritually associating with the Satpurush, fellow *satsangis*, one's own *atma* and the sacred scriptures of the Satsang fellowship

satsangi a member of the Satsang fellowship. One who practices *satsang*

sattva one of the three *gunas*; attribute of clarity and purity of thought, excellence, mental poise

sattvagun quality of goodness

shakotsav vegatable festival

shangar arti second *arti* of the day, performed after breakfast has been offered and the

murtis have been adorned with garments, ornaments and garlands

shikharbaddh mandir in which five *artis* are performed daily and daily worship of deities is performed by sadhus

shiro a sweet delicacy, usually of wheat flour, ghee, sugar and condiments

shloka verses in Sanskrit

shraddh ceremony performed for the propitiation, satisfaction or salvation of the ancestors, mainly by offering rice balls and water

shrotriya one who knows the true meaning of the shastras

stotras hymn of praise

sud the bright half of a month. So Kartik sud means 'the bright half of the month of Kartik'

sutarfeni a sweet delicacy

T

tamas attribute of inactivity, lethargy and darkness

tamoguna quality of darkness

tap austerities – such as fasting, meditation, tolerating extremes of heat and cold

thal food devotionally offered to God as a form of bhakti, which in turn consecrates the food, turning it into *prasad*

tilak the U-shaped mark applied to the forehead with sandalwood paste. It symbolizes the holy feet of God. The *chandlo* is applied in the middle of it

tilak-chandlo U-shaped mark made with sandalwood paste and a round mark of *kumkum* in its centre; a hallmark of one's allegiance to the Swaminarayan Sampradaya

tulsi a shrub with small green leaves regarded as especially holy by Hindus

tumbdi gourd

U

upasana philosophical understanding of the nature of God; mode of worship

utsav festival

V

vad dark half of lunar month

vada a fried savoury bread

vairagya detachment from material objects and pursuits

varna social order of Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishya and Shudra. 'Caste' is a misnomer, a

derogatory term coined by early colonial visitors and writers

vicharan spiritual touring

viman celestial aeroplane

vishay an object indulged in by the *jiva* via the *indriyas* (senses)

vrat a spiritual observance

Y

yagna sacrificial worship. Ceremonial ritual performed as a form of worship to seek the good favour and receive the blessings of the deities

yamdut a servant of Yama